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Mid

WRITINGS FROM THE

With an Introduction
by B. A. BOTKIN

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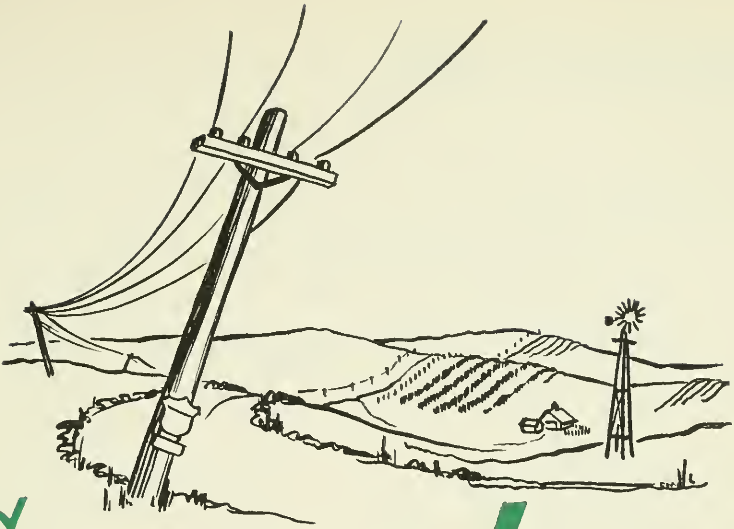

Country

HEART OF AMERICA

Edited by

Lowry C. Wimberly

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The Contents

INTRODUCTION - - - - - - B. A. Botkin xi

THE SOURCE *Story* - - - Katherine Anne Porter 1

THE LONGHORN BLOOD CALL - - - J. Frank Dobie 6

HER QUAINT HONOUR *Story* - - - Caroline Gordon 21

AMERICA'S MYTHOLOGY *Poetry* - - Mark Van Doren 37

THE BUCK IN THE HILLS *Story* - Walter Van Tilburg Clark 42

THE PASSING OF THE TIMBER BEAST - - James Stevens 52

THE PEOPLE'S CHOICE *Story* - - - Erskine Caldwell 59

FOR AN APPLE GROWER *Poetry* - - - Paul Engle 67

SANDHILL SUNDAYS - - - - - - Mari Sandoz 71

AFTER THE CUSTER BATTLE - - - Albert J. Partoll 81

THE HONEY HOUSE *Story* - - - - Mary King 86

THE COUNTRY DOCTOR *Story* - - - - Ivan Beede 104

O PIONEERS! *Poetry* - - - - John Peale Bishop 114

BUFFALO IN THE JUDITH BASIN: 1883 - - Pat T. Tucker 115

A RURAL COMMUNITY *Story* - - - Ruth Suckow 118

INVOCATION *Poetry* - - - - Stephen Vincent Benét 140

TASTING THE MOUNTAIN SPRING *Poetry* - Loren C. Eiseley 141

THE WHISTLE *Story* - - - - - Eudora Welty 142

THE DUEL WITH YELLOW HAND - - - - Stanley Vestal 147

SHADOW OF A GREEN OLIVE TREE *Story* - Warren Beck 158

THE TROUT MAP *Poetry* - - - - - Allen Tate 166

A PARTNERSHIP WITH DEATH *Story* - - Vardis Fisher 168

ARKANSAS *Story* - - - - - Raymond Weeks 177

CLOSING THE YEAR *Poetry* - - - - Alan Swallow 186

THE COLT *Story* - - - - - Wallace Stegner 187

TRESPASS *Poetry* - - - - - - Robert Frost 198

THEY SET A GOOD TABLE - - Alberta Wilson Constant 199

NEW HOPE MEETINGHOUSE *Poetry* - Edgar Lee Masters 209

LADY WILDCAT *Play* - - - - Frederick Kleibacker 212

THE STORM *Story* - - - - - Curtis Martin 225

THE SINGING SNAKES OF THE KARANKAWAS *Story* - - - - - - - Walter Prescott Webb 232

RANK HESTER'S HIRED HELP *Story* - - - Jesse Stuart 236

INDIAN SONGS *Poetry* - - - - Alice Henson Ernst 246

TWO WOMEN AND HOG-BACK RIDGE *Story* - - - - - - - Melvin Van den Bark 248

ROOSTER FIGHT - - - - - - Wayne Gard 263

KANSAS CITY *Poetry* - - - John Gould Fletcher 268

FOUR EAGLE *Story* - - - Elizabeth H. Middleton 269

BAYOU IDYL *Poetry* - - - - John L. Westbrook 280

Good-bye to Cap'm John *Story* - - - S. S. Field 282
Backwoods Humor - - - - Clyde W. Wilkinson 293
Reverdy *Story* - - - - - - Jessamyn West 307
Ranchers *Poetry* - - - - Maurice Lesemann 314
Indians in Blue Jeans - - - - Alice Marriott 315
Not Darkness, but in Shadows *Story* - - Fred Shaw 319
Stone Country *Poetry* - - - - Verne Bright 332
After Branding Calves *Poetry* - - Conrad Pendleton 335
The Snake Without a Friend - - Virginia Duncan 337
Earthy-Ann - - - - - Ruby Pickens Tartt 343
Wyoming Has Wild Horses *Poetry* - C. A. Millspaugh 350
Homestead Woman - - - - Pearl Price Robertson 351
The Cloud Puncher *Story* - - William Cunningham 361
Oilfield Idyl *Story* - - - - Daniel M. Garrison 366
The Death of Tom Mix *Poetry* - - E. S. Forgotson 371
Fern Seed—For Peace - - - - - Ruth Bass 372
The Beast *Story* - - - - Katharine Shattuck 381
The Last Corn Shock *Poetry* - Glenn Ward Dresbach 389
The Funeral *Story* - - - - William March 390
Wolf Hunt - - - - - - A. J. Broadwater 399
Mountain Sibyl - - - - - Nancy Clemens 403

THE COUNTRY IS THE LAND *Poetry* - James Franklin Lewis 407

WASHING UP FOR SUPPER *Poetry* - - Carol Ely Harper 408

TIMBER JUSTICE *Story* - - - - - Robert Swift 410

GOOD-BYE, MARGERY *Story* - - - August Derleth 414

COLORADO POEMS *Poetry* - - - - Will Gibson 419

A THRESHER'S TALE *Story* - - - Rudolph Umland 424

RENTER *Poetry* - - - - - Joseph Langland 428

UNCLE TIGE BENEDICT *Story* - - - John W. Wilson 429

'GATOR-TAIL STEAK - - - - - Frank Thone 434

HIGH TENSION *Story* - - - - - Harry G. Huse 438

EAST WIND *Poetry* - - - - David Cornel DeJong 450

GOD MADE LITTLE APPLES *Story* - - Meridel Le Sueur 451

COURSING THE COYOTE - - - - Aubrey Neasham 464

THE FENCE ROW *Poetry* - - - - James Hearst 467

YOU SHOULD SEE SHETTLES - - - Kathleen Sutton 468

BIG BROTHER *Story* - - - - Charlie May Simon 472

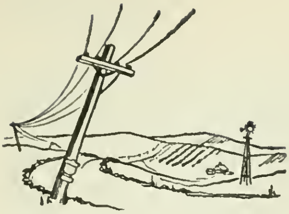
STAMPEDE - - - - - - - J. Evetts Haley 478

THE RED TABLE *Story* - - - Jack M. MacDonald 483

THEY SHALL ARISE *Story* - - - - Grant Marshall 492

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS - - - - - - - - - 495

NOTES ON THE AUTHORS - - - - - - - - 497



Introduction

B. A. Botkin

MID COUNTRY—the land between the mountains—sprawls the gigantic length and breadth of the prairie and the Great Plains from the Appalachians to the Rockies, from the Lakes to the Gulf. Mainly flat or rolling and treeless—"a sea of grass with islands of wood"—it is, however, not one region but many regions in one, the meeting place of North, East, South, and West, all shading imperceptibly into one another. For the dividing line between regions is not a sharp, hard and fast one. As one drives into Colorado from Kansas, one feels rather than sees the plains rise into mountains and the Middle West change to West. And driving East through Ohio one is constantly being reminded of New England. Culturally as well as geographically, Mid Country is trans-America as well as mid-America, the crossroads of the continent. Its very centrality and inland remoteness have kept it typically American. It is both source and product. Its vast inland empire teems with railroads, highways, and inland waterways, with mines, mills, factories, oil fields, and refineries, with grain elevators, stockyards, and packing plants. And its fabulous amplitude is held together by plowland and pastureland, tractor and combine, windmill and silo, barbed wire and fenceposts.

For all its apparent dead-level uniformity, Mid Country is full of contrasts and extremes. It is frontier and section, rich land and poor land, boom town and ghost town, homesteader and sharecropper, exploiter and exploited, beautiful and ugly, a hope and a despair. It is rural and small-town America at its best and worst. Here monotony and drudgery go hand in hand with realism and reform. On the one hand, it has given us Main Streets and Babbitts, Dust Bowl and Okies. On the other hand, it gives us open country and human relationships where we "touch the core of things."

For those who write about it, Mid Country is, first of all, the lay of the land, the look and the feel of it—"something in that to stir the deepest feeling in a man." It may be the Nebraska sandhills—"that country of soft, yellow, shifting undulations." It may be the "wide windswept Montana prairie . . . its relentlessness, its silence, and its sameness . . . the tawny spread of its sundrenched ridges, its shimmering waves of desert air." Mid Country is also the cultural landscape and the way the land is used—corn belt, hog belt, wheat belt, cotton belt, citrus belt. And Mid Country is people living on and off the land—"the face of a prairie woman . . . dried like the soil . . . and the prairie eye that sees without seeing, that adjusts to distances to ward off madness." Mid Country is all this and something more. It is history and tradition, a political and economic system, culture and character. It is the land and the people interwoven in such a way that each has left its mark on the other.

> The plains, river, forests, land, farmer, cattle, the wife, children, anonymous on the plain, and yet forever known, the mark of them on every fencepost like some secret sign, upon the color and sweat of the wooden shack, upon the draining sand, upon the corn shocks in the fall. (Meridel Le Sueur, "The American Way.")

Because Mid Country is a place, it cannot be a "nowhere; an abstract nowhere," as Glenway Wescott once called it. And yet, as he says, "It is a certain climate, a certain landscape; and beyond that, a state of mind of people born where they do not like to live." This mental and intangible factor is something we must reckon with in defining or describing a region. "To some," according to the National Resources Committee report on *Regional Factors in National Planning and Development,* "it may have no more substance than a nostalgia for a landscape of prosperous farms checkerboarded by a rectangular grid of roads, of white houses and big red barns, and elm-and-maple shaded villages."

Perhaps the best way to understand a region is in terms of its people. From its pattern of human relationships as well as from the awareness of its scientists, artists, and ordinary citizens a region emerges as a "collective work of art," in Lewis Mumford's term. If we would know what Mid Country is really like, we must go to its inhabitants and interpreters. Now if we could all go about Mid Country listening to the people talk, we might not need the scientists and the artists. But, failing that, we can hear the people talking in the pages of this book.

For regional writing, like all literature, begins at the folk level with people talking, people who are not writers but who have a story to tell and know how to tell it in their own way, which is, after all, the most effective way. "Never having made an effort to write a story," begins the author of "Wolf Hunt," "I don't expect this will read very good. However, I have had some great experiences. . . ." The second stage of regional writing begins when personal experience and folk-say give way to interpretation and local color, and a writer writes out of love or hatred of the region as well as knowledge of it rather than simply out of love of life. Finally, as Haniel Long has put it, there is the stage where "awareness of anything picturesque in the surroundings ceases" and the writer "goes to all the horizons" and utters the "speech of the spirit confronting destiny in particularized surroundings."

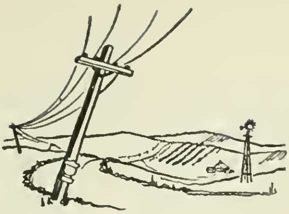
In every region writers tend to form groups, for the purpose of shop talk and mutual admiration and criticism. Sometimes, as in the case of two Missouri writers, Jack Conroy and H. H. Lewis, they write expansively to each other without having met. More often than not, they organize clubs and writers' conferences, get hold of a mimeograph machine or a job press, and start a magazine. Many such groups and magazines have sprung up in state universities, under the leadership and tutelage of some faculty member whose self-appointed mission it is not only to teach the young laurel to shoot but also to see that it has roots. Eventually the luckiest of these magazines are sponsored and handsomely printed by the university presses, which have been called our best regional presses.

Such a regional magazine is a "little" or experimental magazine in a true sense. It not only addresses a limited audience but also cultivates a small plot of ground, its own back-yard. Thus it renders a threefold service. It serves the writers of the region by giving them an outlet, an audience, and a rallying point, perhaps enabling them to write where they live and to live where their material is. It serves the region by keeping writers at home and focussing the attention of both writers and readers on regional sources and problems, by developing the cultural resources of the region as well as their creative expression. And it serves literature by fostering good writing and reading.

Many magazines have come and gone in Mid Country. The eldest of those represented here—*Poetry*—was founded in 1912. Many were born of the depression, when regular markets were closed to young writers. Many have been advance-guard and left-wing. But the older and more typical and enduring of the Mid Country magazines were part of the Midwestern literary renaissance that produced *Poetry*—an indigenous movement for both cultural self-determination and decentralization of publishing. Their very names—the *Midland,* the *Frontier, Prairie Schooner*—are expressive of the region and its spirit.

Through critical articles, book reviews, literary news, history, and folklore, as well as through short stories, sketches, poems, and essays, these magazines serve to unite the writers and readers of the region in a community of interest which is the basis of all regional consciousness. At the same time they have opened their pages to writers of other regions and have thus contributed to an interregional interest which is the basis of a national literature. A combination of literary workshop and bush league, they have not only given many a young writer a start but have attracted the attention of the talent scouts, the anthologists and the publishers, and have helped many Mid Country writers to acquire a national reputation.

For those who live in Mid Country this sampling of Mid Country magazine writing will serve to deepen understanding and appreciation of one's own people and writers. For expatriates from Mid Country reading this book is like going back home. For all others it may serve to reveal the whole in the part. In any case it testifies to the variety and vitality of American literature as a literature of regions; to the healthiness and healthfulness of the provincial and amateur spirit in promoting honesty and resisting slickness; and to the fact that, whether we settle a region, write about it, or read about it, we bring to it as much as we take from it.



The Source

Katherine Anne Porter

ONCE a year, in early summer, after school was closed and the children were to be sent to the farm, the grandmother began to long for the country. With an air of tenderness, as if she enquired after a favorite child, she would ask questions about the crops, wonder what kind of gardens the Negroes were making, how the animals were faring. She would remark now and then, "I begin to feel the need of a little change and relaxation, too," in a vague tone of reassurance, as if to say this did not mean that she intended for a moment really to relax her firm hold on family affairs. It was her favorite theory that change of occupation was one way, probably the best way, of resting. The three grandchildren would begin to feel the faint sure stirring of departure in the house; her son, their father, would assume the air of careful patience which imperfectly masked his annoyance at the coming upsets and inconveniences to be endured at the farm. "Now, Harry, now, Harry!" his mother would warn him, for she was never deceived by his manner; indeed, he never meant her to be; and she would begin trying to placate him by wondering falsely if she could possibly get away, after all, with so much yet to be done where she was. She looked forward with pleasure to a breath of country air. She always imagined herself as walking at leisure in the shade of the orchards watching the peaches ripen; she spoke with longing of clipping the rosebushes, or of tying up the trellised honeysuckle with her own hands. She would pack up her summer-weight skirts, her thin black-and-white basques, and would get out a broad-brimmed, rather battered straw shepherdess hat she had woven for herself just after the War. Trying it on, turning her head critically this way and that before the mirror, she would decide that it might do nicely for the sun and she always took it along, but never wore it. She wore instead a stiffly starched white chambray bonnet, with a round crown buttoned on a narrow brim; it sat pertly on the top of her head with a fly-away look, the long strings hanging stiffly. Underneath this headdress, her pale, tightly drawn, very old face looked out with stately calm.

In the early spring, when the Indian cling peach-tree against the wall of the town house began to bloom, she would say, "I have planted five orchards in three states, and now I see only one tree in bloom." A soft, enjoyable melancholy would come over her; she would stand quite still for a moment looking at the single tree, representing all her beloved trees still blooming, flourishing, and preparing to bring forth fruit in their separate places.

Leaving Aunt Nannie, who had been nurse to her children, in charge of the town house, she set out on her journey.

If departure was a delightful adventure for the children, arriving at the farm was an event for Grandmother. Hinry came running to open the gate, his coal-black face burst into a grin, his voice flying before him: "Howdy-do, Miss Sophia Jane!" simply not noticing that the carryall was spilling over with other members of the family. The horses jogged in, their bellies jolting and churning, and Grandmother, calling out greetings in her feast-day voice, alighted, surrounded by her people, with the same flurry of travel that marked her journeys by train; but now with an indefinable sense of homecoming, not to the house but to the black, rich soft land and the human beings living on it. Without removing her long veiled widow's bonnet, she would walk straight through the house, observing instantly that everything was out of order; pass out into the yards and gardens, silently glancing, making instant plans for changes; down the narrow path past the barns, with a glance into and around them as she went, a glance of firm and purposeful censure; and on past the canebrake to the left, the hayfields to the right, until she arrived at the row of Negro huts that ran along the bois-d'arc hedge.

Stepping up with a pleasant greeting to all, which in no way promised exemption from the wrath to come, she went into their kitchens, glanced into their meal barrels, their ovens, their cupboard shelves, into every smallest crevice and corner, with Littie and Dicey and Hinry and Bumper and Keg following, trying to explain that things was just a little out of shape right now because they'd had so much outside work they hadn't just been able to straighten out the way they meant to; but they were going to get at it right away.

Indeed they were, as Grandmother well knew. Within an hour someone would have driven away in the buckboard for so much lime for whitewash, so many gallons of kerosene oil, and so much carbolic acid and insect powder. Homemade lye soap would be produced from the washhouse, and the frenzy would begin. Every mattress cover was emptied of its corn husks and boiled, every little Negro on the place was set to work picking a fresh supply of husks, every hut was thickly whitewashed, bins and cupboards were scrubbed, every chair and bedstead was varnished, every filthy quilt was brought to light, boiled in a great iron wash-pot and stretched in the sun; and the uproar had all the special character of any annual occasion. The Negro women were put at making a fresh supply of shirts for the men and children, cotton dresses and aprons for themselves. Whoever wished to complain now seized his opportunity. Mister Harry had clean forgot to buy shoes for Hinry; look at Hinry: Hinry had been just like that, barefooted the livelong winter. Mister Miller (a red-whiskered man who occupied a dubious situation somewhere between overseer when Mister Harry was absent, and plain hired hand when he was present) had skimped them last winter on everything you could think of—not enough cornmeal, not half enough bacon, not enough wood, not enough of anything. Littie had needed a little sugar for her cawfy and do you think Mister Miller would let her have it? No. Mister Miller had said nobody needed sugar in their cawfy. Hinry said Mr. Miller didn't even take sugar in his own cawfy because he was just too stingy. Boosker, the three-year-old baby, had earache in January and Miz Carleton had come down and put lodnum in it and Boosker was acting like she was deef ever since. The black horse Mister Harry bought last fall had gone clean wild and jumped a barbed wire fence and tore his chest almost off and hadn't been any good from that time on.

All these grievances and dozens like them had to be adjusted suitably; then Grandmother's attention was turned to the main house, which had to be overhauled completely. The big secretaries were opened and shabby old sets of Dickens, Scott, Thackeray, Dr. Johnson's dictionary, the volumes of Pope and Milton and Dante and Shakespeare were dusted off and closed up carefully again. Curtains came down in dingy heaps and went up again stiff and sweet-smelling; rugs were heaved forth in dusty confusion and returned flat and gay with flowers once more; the kitchen was no longer dingy and desolate but a place of heavenly order where it was tempting to linger.

Next the barns and smokehouses and the potato cellar, the gardens and every tree or vine or bush must have that restoring touch upon it. For two weeks this would go on, with the grandmother a tireless, just, and efficient slave driver of every creature on the place. The children ran wild outside, but not as they did when she was not there. The hour came in each day when they were rounded up, captured, washed, dressed properly, made to eat what was set before them without giving battle, put to bed when the time came and no nonsense. . . . They loved their grandmother; she was the only reality to them in a world that seemed otherwise without fixed authority or refuge, since their mother had died so early that only the eldest girl remembered her vaguely; just the same they felt that Grandmother was a tyrant, and they wished to be free of her; so they were always pleased when, on a certain day, as a sign that her visit was drawing to an end, she would go out to the pasture and call her old saddle horse, Fiddler.

He had been a fine, thorough-paced horse once, but he was now a weary, disheartened old hero, with grey whiskers on his jaw and chin, who spent his life nuzzling with pendulous lips for tender bits of grass or accepting sugar cautiously between his shaken teeth. He paid no attention to anyone but the grandmother. Every summer when she went to his field and called him, he came doddering up with almost a gleam in his filmy eyes. The two old creatures would greet each other fondly. The grandmother always treated her animal friends as if they were human beings temporarily metamorphosed, but not by this accident dispensed from those duties suitable to their condition. She would have Fiddler brought around under her old sidesaddle—her little granddaughters rode astride and she saw no harm in it, for them—and mount with her foot in Uncle Jimbilly's curved hand. Fiddler would remember his youth and break into a stiff-legged gallop, and off she would go with her crepe bands and her old-fashioned riding skirt flying. They always returned at a walk, the grandmother sitting straight as a sword, smiling, triumphant. Dismounting at the horse-block by herself, she would stroke Fiddler on the neck before turning him over to Uncle Jimbilly, and walk away carrying her train grandly over her arm.

This yearly gallop with Fiddler was important to her; it proved her strength, her unabated energy. Any time now Fiddler might drop in his tracks, but she would not. She would say, "He's getting stiff in the knees," or "He's pretty short-winded this year," but she herself walked lightly and breathed as easily as ever, or so she chose to believe.

That same afternoon or the next day, she would take her long-promised easy stroll in the orchards with nothing to do, her grandchildren running before her and running back to her side: with nothing at all to do, her hands folded, her skirts trailing and picking up twigs, turning over little stones, sweeping a faint path behind her, her white bonnet askew over one eye, an absorbed fixed smile on her lips, her eyes missing nothing. This walk would usually end with Hinry or Jimbilly being dispatched to the orchards at once to make some trifling but indispensable improvement.

It would then come over her powerfully that she was staying on idling when there was so much to be done at home. . . . There would be a last look at everything, instructions, advices, good-byes, blessings. She would set out with that strange look of leaving forever, and arrive at the place in town with the same air of homecoming she had worn on her arrival in the country, in a gentle flurry of greetings and felicitations, as if she had been gone for half a year. At once she set to work restoring to order the place which always proved to have gone somewhat astray in her absence.

The Longhorn Blood Call

J. Frank Dobie

Way down on Sam Bonello,
Long time ago,
Big black bull run down in the meader,
Long time ago.
He pawed up dust and then he beller,
Long time ago,
Shook his head and jarred the water,
Long time ago.
—Negro song of a long time ago, South Texas

IN WINTERTIME the bulls kept apart, some individuals staying utterly alone, the others ranging together in small bunches, looking upon each other with lacklustre eye, hardly looking at cows at all, not one moved by the faintest intimation of a dream from the sources of their bullhood. But by the time the grass was up high enough to afford whole mouthfuls, even the draggiest old bull had the feeling that the sun rose for his particular benefit, while at the same time the "shelliest" old cow shed her poverty-bedraggled hair and came into ambitions that made her forget the misery of suckling a calf on weak weed-tips in front of a wet February norther.

A seasonable spring was becoming summer in some year before 1890. Any ranch in the southern half of Texas might be taken as the setting, but to please my own memories we'll particularize one on Ramireña Creek in the county of Live Oak, where the wild turkeys were already finding chilipiquin peppers, and mustang grapes were big and hard enough for nigger-shooter bullets.

A brindle bull, six or seven years old—at the apex of his prowess—had been hanging around the Ramirez waterhole for hours. His powerful neck showed a great bulge just behind the head. He had a big dewlap accenting his primeval origin. He had drunk but was by no means waterlogged, for he belonged to a breed that knew what it was to drink only once every three days and then walk directly for hours back to grass. Overeating or overdrinking would never allow those powerfully muscled foreparts and lithe flanks.

Three or four bulls were among the cattle, perhaps a hundred and fifty head, resting in the vicinity. But Brindle paid little attention to them. They knew their places and they regarded him as impersonally as did the cows, heifers, calves, and steers. A bull does not cut out a bunch of cows, herd them together and claim them for his own as a stallion claims mares, fighting all other stallions away. His promiscuity destroys loyalty in both himself and the cows. He is free of the jealousy that goes with loyalty. He has no cohesive following. The dominion of a champion fighter of the range was territorial, the other bulls in that territory recognizing his prowess but being free to go their own ways with any cows that showed them favor.

A majority of the cattle this day at the Ramirez waterhole were lying down or standing in the shade, out of sight of Brindle, chewing their cuds. Yet all, by the way they turned their heads and now and then ceased their cud-chewing to listen, indicated an interest in him —the acknowledged bull of their woods. The woods consisted of prairie land running into and islanded with thorny thickets, and of noble live oaks overtopping mesquites, hackberries, granjeno, brazil, and other growth along the creek bottom.

Brindle had been calling plenty of attention to himself. He seemed mad through and through, though it was not in his nature to vent his rage—a rage sullen and reserved—on just any member of society that got in his way. Utterly oblivious for the time of the world animate and inanimate, male and female, around him, he went on nursing his wrath to keep it warm against some contester worthy of his mettle who might emerge from beyond the rim of his acknowledged domain.

Having taken a position on a rise of open ground perhaps a hundred yards up from the waterhole, he had for a long while been pawing dirt from an old bull-scrape in the soft soil—a sink about like a buffalo wallow. He lifted the dirt with his forefeet so that it went high up in the air and fell in part upon his own back. While pawing, he often stopped to hook one of his horns—the "master horn" as Spanish bullfighters call it—into the ground, goring down to a kind of clayish damp that stuck to the tip. He even hooked both horns in, one at a time, and rubbed his shoulder against the bank of the wallow. At times the uplifted dirt from his flexible ankles came down in clumps and dust on tossing horns. The powerful lungs in his body, free from choking fat, bellowsed out streams of breath that sprayed particles of earth, either on the ground or in the air, away from his nostrils. Now, earth daubing his horns, matting his shaggy frontlet, and covering his back from head to tail, he was a spectacle.

But pawing and dirt hooking had been nothing compared to his vocal goings-on. When he came in to water, he was talking to himself, his truculent head swaying with the rhythm of his walk and the weight of his thick horns, bases four or five inches in diameter. Hoarse and deep, like thunder on the horizon, his mumbling talk went *uh-uh-uh-uh,* four deliberate notes, the last a low-descending jerk, in four steps. This was his war march. Often he paused the throaty *uh-uh-uh-uhing* and halted to raise his head in a loud, high, defiant challenge that might be described as a basso-scream, combining a bellow from the uttermost profundities with a shriek high and foreign. Beside the waterhole a fat two-year-old calico-colored heifer craved his attention, but only by a few curls and astounding twists of his upward-pointing nose after he smelled of her did he seem aware of her existence. His mind was on other things.

Thus now, pawing up dirt, lunging his horn in as if to rip out the guts of the earth, bawling, bellowing, muttering, shattering the air, Brindle was sending his threats, his oaths of revenge, his challenge to earth and hell too over the hills, against the echoing caliche cliffs on the far side of the Ramireña, and up a little canyon that emptied into the creek just above the waterhole. As his fury waxed, he now and then let out in quick succession a series of far-carrying fast bawls agonizing to human senses, for they seemed to be tearing the very lungs out of the bawler.

Then at what seemed the zenith of this ecstasy of rage he heard something that infuriated the bottom-most reserve of passion.

"He shook his head and jarred the water." What he heard was an answer to his prayer, a response to his invitation, a defiance of his boasted power, a mockery of his challenge. The sounds were coming from the prairie divide between Ramireña and Lagarto Creeks, the eager-for-battle maker of them having been lured from his trail to another wateringhole three or four miles away. He could not be seen yet, but he was drawing nearer. *Uh-uh-uh-uh,* and then mighty throatings, growling a deep and hollow roar.

At length he came into view, a glossy dunnish brown merging into black—the *golondrino* (swallow) color—white speckles and splotches on his rump and a washed-out copper line down his back. His thick horns, like Brindle's, were set forward for tossing a lobo wolf into the air or ripping any kind of belly open as effectively as that scimitar-curved plebeian Mexican knife called *saca tripas* (gets the guts).

It was a belief that the bulls kept their horns sharpened for bloody work by rubbing them against trees and brush and whetting them in the ground. A hundred yards off the *golondrino* bull stopped and went to pawing dirt, answering bellow for bellow. He not only gored the earth but he thrust his horns into the tough stems of a cenizo bush and, jerking and twisting his head from side to side, broke the bush to stubble. He came nearer, but the preliminaries were long-drawn-out, each warrior practicing his thrusts, each seeming to wait for the other to take upon himself the war-guilt of the first assault, yet neither one wearing himself out with exercise. The bullying was by no means froth; back of it was immense reserve.

Brindle emerged from his wallow. Then he and Golondrino began to circle each other, each fronting his antagonist and maneuvering for an opening. They halted perhaps four yards apart. Meantime the other cattle had congregated, keeping well out of the way, and with sympathetic bawlings were adding to the atmosphere. Cattle could be seen stringing in at a trot from faraway, attracted like boys to a dog fight. The big steers, which often seem to imagine themselves bulls—and which no bull ever notices—were especially interested.

Now the time for talk by the champions was over. The object of each was to get a side entrance for his horns, but each was a master of defense. At the simultaneous lunge that brought them together, the impact of skull against skull and horn against horn made an air-shattering report like that when an iron-headed freight car is rammed into the iron of another car. Then, heads locked, the bulls stood planted in the soil, neither giving way to the other. Shoulder muscles stood out like bronze studies; massive neck thews rose almost to the height of humps on Brahma bulls; backs bowed tensely. One bull and then the other tried a quick side-step to unbalance his opponent and get in a side swipe, but neither could get the advantage. With horns that were both weapon and shield, they parried strokes in such rapidity that the clashes could hardly have been counted. They backed and rushed again and again. The dust they raised went up into the air like a signal smoke. The ground they fought over was torn up as if giants with spikes and spades on their feet had wrestled there.

The shovings, the head-on lunges, the dodges, the impregnable stands went on and on. The heat of the strain brought slobber to mouths, and tongues lolled out. Eyes, bloodshot, bulged forth. Once Brindle's horn brought blood from a tear—which, however, he was not allowed to take advantage of—in Golondrino's brisket. The smell of blood was caught by an old blue steer among the surrounding cattle and the blood cry went up and volumed in a discordant chorus. The throng of cattle now congregated was as uneasy and excited as a million robins gathered to migrate from the cedar brakes of the Colorado River to their summer homes on the Atlantic coast two thousand miles north. A coyote came to peer from behind a prickly pear bush up the ridge.

The sun went down. The bulls backed off from each other and pawed up dust. Then with hearts still pumping against bursting lungs, they clashed again. Darkness came.

Often the battle was a draw, ending only from sheer exhaustion on both sides. Once a bull realized he was outdone, he backed as if shot out of a catapult, wheeled with a loud snuff, and ran for life. If he ran fast enough, his opponent could at best merely hook him in the rump—a spur to added swiftness. Let the victor get a side run at him, then he might knock him down and gore the vitals out of him. Death, while not frequent, was sometimes the end of the battle.

Against an old bull a young one had the advantage of endurance; cunning acquired from many experiences often gave victory to a waning bull pitted against some youngster with more strength and bravery than science. If this youngster was not killed, his day would come. He was acquiring experience. The whole activity of a high-grade Hereford bull, despite his big horns, is begetting calves; at least half the activity of the Longhorn range bull was in battle. Fighting was the breath of life to him. As the Spaniard would say, that is what God gave him his testicles for.

Despite front attacks, I have never heard of a bull's hooking his opponent's eye out—a tribute to parrying powers. A veteran vaquero told me that he once saw a wild bull gore another through the top of the neck. The horn went clear through that thickest part of the bull's thick hide. It was so deeply twisted in and the hide was so unyielding that for a considerable time the bulls were fastened together not unlike bucks with interlocked antlers.

Although it is not the nature of cattle to graze and move about at night like horses, the wild Longhorns were much more given to night activity than domesticated varieties. When bulls fought at night, then their bellowing and roaring, the bawling of other cattle, the hoarse howls of lobo wolves aroused by hope for a victim as they restlessly circled out from the fighters, and the long-drawn-out cries of coyotes beyond the lobos gave the prairie a truly weird character.

It is impossible to convey sounds in print—the wild, raucous hair-raising sounds made by the old range bulls; their growls; their threats loud and deep that seemed to blast the earth; their uplifted notes carrying like the finest coyote bark; their expressions of pride and fury. But imagine them coming down a thicket or over the prairie grass in the deep night.

All you can do is imagine. "The Spanish bull that used to water at the seep spring at the foot of the hill no longer makes the canyon roar with the echoes of his bellowing."

When a herd of cattle was rounded up from a wide-spreading range, thus bringing into proximity bulls that were strangers to one another, each of them a big frog in his own little puddle, there was sure to be raging and roaring, and fighting was inevitable unless the opponents were separated before they actually clashed horns. "Prayer meeting" was the name an old Negro hand used to give these carryings-on of the bulls. "Jes' listen to 'um testifyin'," he'd say. A "prayer meeting" of this kind made working in a herd both difficult and dangerous. Any responsible cowman would break it up before zeal ran too high.

At one fight that started in a herd, John Rigby saw a cow get in the way just at the moment the bulls simultaneously rushed at each other. One rammed his horns into her belly from one side and one from the other. She was lifted high up and came down dying.

On One-armed Jim Reed's Double Mountain Fork Ranch about 1880, two Longhorn bulls that had been fighting for an hour drew apart from each other while a Mexican driving three loose horses came by. A young greenhorn horse got in between the bulls just as they started to clash again. One of the bulls ripped into him, drawing out a fold of entrails on his horn. The Mexican tried to daub up the wound with horse manure—a favorite remedy—but the horse died.

The worst danger of a fight was when one of the bulls decided to quit. His sole purpose then was to get away. Running from his opponent, he would have his eyes and attention on the brute behind him, trusting to his own power to get through or over any obstacle that might arise in front of him. Not many men had the foolhardiness to try to ride in to separate the fighters; for though a man might stop the fight, he was liable to be in the way of the flight. I know one man who was working on horseback with some cattle a short distance off from two engaged bulls, not keeping an eye on them, when suddenly one broke away and rammed into the horse, killing it and crippling the man for life. Other such instances could be adduced.

Ask any old-time range man of the south country to name the quickest animal he has ever known. He won't say a cutting horse, a polo pony, a wildcat, a striking rattlesnake. He doesn't know the duck hawk. He will say a Longhorn bull. Some other bulls are quick; many breeds fight, even the Polled Angus. But none of them can bawl, bellow, mutter, and rage like the bulls of Spanish breed, and none can move with such swiftness. They are in the bull rings of Spain, Mexico, and the Argentine today because they are the greatest fighting bulls of the world.

The bull fight the Texas range people delighted in was that between equals on the range. Like scattered cattle, riders were often called to the battles from afar. Boys, usually without sanction from the profit-lusting cattle owners, would drive a proven champion from his range to another in quest of a fight. On Sunday sometimes quite an aggregation of boys and men would gather for a prearranged combat, champions being driven from distant areas to some watering place, where other cattle could add to the show. Voices as well as fighting power were highly regarded. At branding time any fighting cow's bull-calf that demonstrated bravado, alacrity, strength, and lusty lungs would be branded and let loose uncastrated to make a fighting bull, the possibility of round steaks on the hind legs of his progeny having nothing to do with the selection.

If a bull decided he would not be driven from his range, no matter for what purpose, that was an end of the matter; but the herd instinct usually made him tractable in the company of other cattle. Yet not always. On the Stoner Ranch in the Victoria country there used to be a bull named Frank Swift. He was called after the man who had raised him, an individual with the habit of swallowing at one gulp a whole handful of the fiery little red Mexican peppers. Frank Swift was in color a dark dun running into white. Every once in a while he would be put in a herd bound for the shipping pens at Victoria, but he never got there. When he was ready to turn back, he turned; and the only way to stop him would have been to shoot him. Of course his horns might have been chopped off, and then he might have been necked to some powerful lead ox and dragged to the pens. After such punishment he would hardly have been worth the freight. Once Frank Swift traveled to within sight of the pens, and the cowboys thought he was on his way sure this time to make canned beef. Then he changed his mind about taking another step forward. He was the champion fighter and bellower of the country, and these virtues saved his life.

The horn of a fighting bull has the penetrating power of a spike driven by a sledge hammer. "Many times," says Ernest Hemingway in his treatise on bulls and bullfighting, *Death in the Afternoon,* "I have seen a bull attack the inch-thick wooden planks of the *barrera* with his horns, or horn rather, for he uses either the one or the other, and splinter the planks into bits. There is in the bull ring museum at Valencia, a heavy iron stirrup that a bull perforated with a horn stroke to the depth of four inches."

Hemingway cites a Spanish work called *Toros Celebres* "which chronicles the manner of dying and the feats of some three hundred and twenty-two pages of celebrated bulls" of the bull ring. Such a volume might be compiled on celebrated fighting bulls of the Longhorn range—lineal descendants and collateral kinsmen of the bull-ring breed.

They did not fight as cornered creatures forced to exercise the instinct for self-preservation. Afraid of nothing on earth, their bravery was almost unearthly. They joyed in combat with each other and sometimes sought combat with other beasts and with man himself. Nat Straw, the great grizzly bear hunter of New Mexico, told me that he was in the Black Range when cattle, Longhorns from Texas, were introduced in that region. Then, he said, the grizzly bear—*ursus horribilis*—met the first living beasts, the bulls, they had ever known that would not give way to them.

Illustrative of the combats that took place, I will tell what my good friend Jack (N. Howard) Thorp, compiler of *Songs of the Cowboys* and author of that delightful book *Tales of the Chuck Wagon,* told me.

Along in the 'nineties, he said, while he was working with the Circle Bar outfit in New Mexico, he and another cowboy were sent to a sign camp near the mouth of the Sacramento River for a bunch of saddle horses. They were chousing the horses up the bed of the river and were about to turn them into a trail topping out on a mesa, when they saw a bull standing near the water at the trail entrance. He was a Longhorn, light red in color, about six years old. Both men were familiar with him, for each had more than once given him the trail as he came down to water.

"As we rode around him now," Jack Thorp related, "and saw him standing so quiet, we noticed one eye was gone and a great patch of hide and hair was hanging down from his back just behind the shoulders. His foreparts were badly clawed. Both horns were covered with dried blood. The claw marks showed he had been mixed up with something besides another bull, and we were guessing what it might be.

"About halfway up the steep trail was a flat—a little bench—where the trail made a sharp turn. At this point the horses ahead of us snorted and broke away into the brush. Jumping ahead to turn them back, we noticed how the shin-oak over a big patch of ground had been broken down and the earth torn up. After turning the horses back, we investigated. A hundred feet or so away to the north of the trail bend, partly across a fallen log, lay a monstrous grizzly, his entrails strung out on the ground and his hair matted with dried blood. The bull, even if he didn't come off unmarked, had very plainly horned this grizzly bear to death. Yes, that Longhorn bull got all right, but being one-eyed kind of cramped his style."

Back in the 'eighties a dun line-backed bull on the Cross S range in the brush country of Texas achieved a wide reputation. Like certain other notable individuals of his stripe, he would waylay trails and attack horsemen from the rear. One time, Jake English swears, he was riding along on a paint horse close to a thicket when the dun bull rushed upon him and ripped the guts out of the paint almost before horse or man knew the bull was in the vicinity. Unhurt, Jake English climbed a little tree. The tree went to falling and Jake thought his time had come, but the bull at this juncture made off. This bull had been roped several times, but every time a rope was put on him he managed to charge the horse so that the rope had to be cut. He had, it is claimed, worn out four rawhide riatas strung on him and had killed ten horses when he finally took up with some milk cows and came to the pen of a rancher who recognized him and shot him dead.

I know that this account by Tom East of the King Ranch is true. While vaqueros were cleaning up a big pasture of the Norias Ranch —a subdivision of the King Ranch holdings—they found that an outlaw bull was watering at a certain well. He was one of the old-time brown breed with a yellow stripe down his back. Reading sign, the vaqueros learned that the bull habitually approached the water trough by a trail leading under a live oak tree. One evening two of them went to the well before watering time, hid their horses in brush a considerable distance away from the trail, tied them fast, took ropes and climbed up in the tree with the idea of roping the bull when he should pass underneath. After waiting a good while, expecting every minute to see the bull, they heard a horse shriek and other sounds of commotion. Rushing to their horses, they saw the bull goring one to death, the other one already dead. The bull had smelled these animals and, knowing from experience that they carried his enemies, had rushed upon them. A day or two later a vaquero shot the bull—the only form of conquest he would submit to. His dagger-sharp black horns are still at Las Norias.

Some few bulls seemed to be positive man-haters. One of them might charge a campfire, the sign of man. Years ago a man-hating bull ranged in the vicinity of the Fronteriza Mine in mountains facing the Rio Grande on the Mexico side. He was a blend of gold, brown, and black colors—the *josco-golondrino.* At the base of his neck he had an enormous hump; curly thick hair from his forehead almost covered his eyes.

One day a Mexican *pastor*—goatherder—was coming into the Tinaja de los Alamos driving a burro loaded with provisions when this bull, loitering at the waterhole, saw him. Immediately he charged, killing both burro and man. As sign was afterward read, he smeared himself with the man's blood and caused a great commotion among the other cattle. During days that followed he returned several times to the waterhole, trampling the remains of the man and hooking them about but paying no attention to the dead burro. This account comes from Don Alberto Guajardo of Piedras Negras, who at the time was ranching in the Fronteriza country and eventually shot the bull, using more than twenty .30-.30 bullets on him before he brought him down.

"On skinning him," Don Alberto wrote me, "I observed that he had several bullets in the hide and flesh near his left ear. I deduced that other hunters had tried to kill him. Perhaps for this reason he was so spiteful towards man."

Yet range bulls killed very few men. Even in Texas, where, according to the old saying, there used to be more cows and less milk than anywhere else on earth, the number of people gored by Longhorn bulls over a period of a hundred years was probably less than the number gored by Jersey bulls in recent decades. Sam Allen, who owned and handled hundreds of thousands of Longhorns, is said to have offered ten thousand dollars to the widow of any man working for him killed by a bull. The offer may have added to the bravery of some of his hands. He never had to make it good.

Some cowboys would get in a pen with a fighting bull and dare him by making feints with a hat or a ducking jacket, as a matador uses his cape in the bull ring. Morris Mack, a Negro of the San Bernard, would squat down in the pen with any bull that raged. "Bull won't know what you is when you squat," Morris Mack explained. "Then he'll be scairt." Maybe so. One old rawhide I knew would get down on his all-fours and paw up dirt, mocking with bellowings the bull in front of him. He was a curiosity to man as well as to beast.

A man on horseback charged by a bull couldn't squat or paw up dirt. There are accounts of how bulls down in the border country used to walk out in front of a herd of cattle that had just been thrown together and dare horsemen to enter. Sometimes they would stand between the herd and horsemen, "guarding it like stallions."

Ernest Hemingway discredits the popular idea that a bull charges with eyes shut, whereas a cow keeps hers open. Nevertheless, many men experienced in handling fierce cattle have been more leery of a fighting cow in a pen than of a fighting bull.

Many a Longhorn cow would not wait for the drop of a hat to fight. She was all pluck and vinegar, as ready as a fighting cock for the chance to use her spurs. She would fight a circular saw, fight "six yoke of oxen, hired man and a breaking plow," fight anything. If she was bogged down and a man pulled her out and then "tailed her up"—helping her from the rear to rise on her forelegs—the first wobble she made after getting on her feet was in an attempt to hook the man. The bravest bulls came from cows just as brave, not only in defending their calves but in standing off pursuers and often from the spirit of pure aggression. But of course, no cow has the strength of a bull. Cows do not fight bulls, as the females of most species fight the males.

Jack Thorp, who told of the bull that killed a grizzly, was driving years ago with his wife from Albuquerque to Santa Fe in one of Henry Ford's earliest models, the foreparts trimmed brilliantly with brass. The car was laboring up a steep mountain, radiator boiling, hugging the bank of a road so narrow that cars could pass each other only at bends, when Jack saw, almost falling over herself as she tore down the road, an old Longhorn cow—one of several thousand from the Terrazas herds in Chihuahua that had been turned loose in that country. There was no room to get out of her way. She did not propose to get out of anybody's way. She hooked one horn into the radiator and the other under it, raised the front part of the car up and struggled until the rear end hung in the bank. Only after water boiled out on her head did she disengage herself. Then she high-tailed it—"the only Longhorn," Jack Thorp says, "I ever knew to take a licking."

In talking of bulls I have dwelt long on their wonderful utterances. No wild animal or domestic either that I know of—nor lion, dog, horse, or bird—has as many vocal tones as the Longhorn. In comparison, the bulls and cows of highly bred varieties of cattle are voiceless. The cow of the Longhorns has one *moo* for her new-born calf, another for it when it is older, one to tell it to come to her side, and another to tell it to stay hidden in the tall grass where she has secured it. Moved by amatory feelings, she has a low audible breath of yearning for the bull. In anger she can run a gamut. If her calf has died or been otherwise taken from her, she seems to be turning her insides out into long, sharp, agonizing bawls. I have heard steers make similar sounds. They seemed to be in the utmost agony of expressing something so poignant to them that the utterance meant more than life and would be willingly paid for by death.

The bawling of cattle in the agony of thirst used to be all too familiar a sound on ranches before wells and tanks became plentiful and the gasoline engine was devised to pump water when the wind fails to blow. Day and night, day and night, it would go on around empty water troughs—the moans getting weaker in time, though the endurance of a cow brute in keeping up a continual bawling would make insignificant the record of any long-winded filibuster that ever held the floor of Congress. Cattle walking a fence in futile anxiety to get back to a range they have been driven from make the same distressful, relentless sounds.

There is something almost refreshing in the lusty bawl of a big bull calf being branded. The "gosling stage" voice of a bull yearling is positively ridiculous. An old stag or bull of the Longhorn breed, when wounded, would stick his tongue out a full foot and bawl so loud that cattle two miles away would turn to listen—a sound far more startling than refreshing.

The mingled bawls and lowings, each of a different pitch, strength and timbre, of a big herd of mixed cattle held forcibly while hungry and thirsty after a day of being ginned about, frantic young cows and headstrong old cows separated from their calves, calves in misery for their mothers, yearlings adding to the din in the same way that each of forty babies will go to crying if one opens up, steers bawling for their lost powers of masculinity or for the same reason that great Arctic wolves bay at the midnight sun or from some urge that only God is aware of, bulls bellowing at the memory of past combats or maybe without memory at all—all make a kind of music to many a cowman's ears, especially at a distance.

But no cattle voicings, not even those attending a bull fight, ever had the power, the might and the terror of the massed blood call. In *The Naturalist of La Plata,* W. H. Hudson has described it well.

Out on the pampas of the Argentine, where Spanish cattle ranged in countless numbers, Hudson came one morning to a spot where thieves had butchered a cow during the night, leaving the ground soaked with blood. At the same time, he relates, "a herd of cattle numbering about three hundred head appeared, moving slowly on towards a small stream a mile away. They were traveling in a thin line, and would pass the bloodstained spot at a distance of seven or eight hundred yards, but the wind from it would blow across their track. When the tainted wind struck the leaders of the herd, they instantly stood still, raising their heads, then broke out into loud excited bellowings; and, finally turning, they started off at a fast trot, following up the scent in a straight line until they arrived at the place where one of their kind had met its death. The contagion spread, and before long all the cattle were congregated on the fatal spot, and began moving round in a dense mass, bellowing continually.

"It may be remarked here that the animal has a peculiar language on occasions like this; it emits a succession of short bellowing cries, like excited exclamations, followed by a very loud cry, alternately sinking into a hoarse murmur, and rising to a kind of scream that grates harshly on the sense. Of the ordinary 'cow music' I am a great admirer, and take as much pleasure in it as in the cries and melody of birds and the sound of the wind in the trees; but this performance of cattle excited by the smell of blood is most distressing to hear.

"The animals that had forced their way into the center of the mass to the spot where the blood was, pawed the earth, and dug it up with their horns, and trampled each other down in their frantic excitement. It was terrible to see and hear them. The action of those on the border of the living mass in perpetually moving round in a circle with dolorous bellowings was like that of the women in an Indian village when a warrior dies and all night they shriek and howl with simulated grief, going round and round the dead man's hut in an endless procession."

One of the memories I shall carry to the last is of cattle congregating around the hide of a freshly killed cow that had been thrown, the flesh side up, over a log fence between a pen and a pasture of about four thousand acres. The hide had been flung there at the end of a summer day, after most of the cattle watering at troughs in the pen had come in, drunk, rested under the shade trees for hours, drunk again, and gone out to graze in the cool of the evening. But two or three latecomers, among them a big pale red and white-spotted steer about three-fourths "cold blooded" in his breeding, smelled the hide. They began to bellow. Cattle not yet grazed out beyond hearing came to the sounds in a trot, adding to the wild utterance. Cattle beyond them heard and came too, calling yet others from parts of the pasture watered by another well. By dark between two and three hundred cattle were milling and carrying on, bawling their lungs out and making such a to-do that we could hardly eat our suppers in the rock house a hundred and fifty yards up the hill.

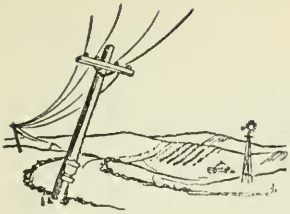
The blood call was used as a means for tolling wild brush cattle into the open. After Mexicans had roped and waylaid these outlaw cattle for generations, an Irish-American cowman named Mike Carrigan conceived the idea of utilizing the blood call. He was ranging a large number of aged steers in a big country where thorns are as thick as the hair on a dog's back. He was about to gather a train load of them to ship.

The evening before the work was to start, while a cow was being butchered, he saved a bucket of blood. Early next morning he carried it to an open spot where steers bedded every night, poured it on the ground, drove a few gentle steers—gentle enough to get in sight of and hold in a herd—to where the blood had been spilled, hid his men in a thicket, and then let nature work. Those beeves set up a bellering —a word much more expressive than *bellowing*—and a bawling that soon drew five hundred of their kind to the stomping grounds. Among them were mossy horns that for years had hardly been in a place open enough to hold their shadows. Carrigan's vaqueros now slipped out of their hiding and had their herd together before the steers knew work was started. Old Mike Carrigan used to call this method "gathering cattle de luxe."

Claude McGill could imitate the blood call and draw cattle to him. Jack Maltsberger, another brush-country cowman, conceived the idea of a blowing horn that would give the blood calls. I have seen him blow it and bring up a bunch of cattle that by their own agitated calls would drown out a foghorn.

Yet by no means did every hide or whiff of blood excite such demonstrations. Often the blood was almost unnoticed and mass meetings over it were comparatively rare. It was not sorrow over the death of a fellow being that excited the blood call. Only mother cows when they lose their calves and one of a pair of old oxen when his mate dies evince concern over death. The "smell of mortality" seems to have little effect on cattle. The "cow funerals" that the little McKee girls used to listen to on the Brazos prairies were not from pity or mourning. The smell of fresh blood alone provokes those mighty wails from ravished cow throats—though, as I have indicated, the alarming calls will bring responses from cattle that have only heard but have not yet been maddened by the smell in their own nostrils. I am not sure, but I think that only cow blood has the power to awaken the terror both expressed and aroused by the blood call.

Superb as it may be, the mounting of animals in museums without representation of their voices leaves out something very characteristic and dramatic. Will nobody mount me a brindle bull and add to him the call of blood and the bellow of battle!



Her Quaint Honour

Caroline Gordon

THE first year I was at Taylor's Grove I raised ten thousand pounds of tobacco. Five thousand pounds of lugs and seconds and five thousand pounds of prime leaf. And, boy, was it prime! I ought to have got thirty cents for that leaf the way it was selling that year. But I didn't get but fifteen. That yellow wife of Tom Doty's was the cause of that.

I was raised at the Grove, but I had a fuss with my folks one fall and I went off to Louisville and worked in a garage. I got to be a pretty good mechanic, but they kept me at it eighteen hours a day. I figured there was no percentage in that; so I saved up some money and started me a combined garage and filling station. I made money on the service end, or would have if it hadn't been for my friends. They came from all over town and were all slow pay. Then the depression hit us. I started lying awake nights worrying about the pay roll. One night I got to thinking about all that land at the Grove. It don't belong to me or to any of us—yet. It belongs to my grandmother. She is seventy-five years old and hell on wheels. Always has been, they tell me. Still I knew that if I could stand the old lady I was welcome to go there and farm.

I got up the next morning and went to see a man I know. By afternoon I'd sold the shop, including some high-priced accessories, and was heading for South Todd.

But I didn't go straight to the old place. I went by to see a nigger I know. Tom Doty was the house boy at the Grove when I was a kid. Then later he got to be a hand and finally foreman and he stayed there till he had some trouble with my grandmother and had to leave. I reckon I'd better stop now and tell you about my grandmother. She is the only woman in South Todd old enough to have owned slaves—her parents died when she was little—and she has never got over it. The niggers say can't anybody get along with her and don't any of them try it. The poor white people don't know as well as the niggers do, and two or three families move on the place every year. But they never make more than one crop there. As the old lady says, "They don't suit the place."

But this Tom Doty I was telling you about always could get along with her when he wanted to. And besides that he is the smartest nigger and the fastest worker I ever knew. I always said that if I ever went to farming I'd try to get hold of Tom, so I stopped at Price's Station and found he was cropping at a Mr. Bannerman's and went right on over there.

It was just before Christmas, but it was a warm day. Tom was sitting on the doorstep, sunning. I thought he must be doing right well at Mr. Bannerman's, for everything he had on was new—leather coat and tan shoes and a pair of those purple corduroy pants the niggers like so much. He looked good in 'em too. Tom is a tall, handsome nigger, with a very black face and a big, real nigger mouth. My grandmother always said he had Coromantee blood in him.

I drove up to the door. "Hello, Tom," I said. "Have you traded for next year?"

He jumped right up. "God help me! If it ain't Mister Jim!"

"It ain't anybody else," I told him. "Have you traded yet?"

"I ain't named it to Mister Bannerman," he said, "but I reckon he'll let me stay here long as I want to."

"How'd you like to make a crop with me?"

Tom kind of grins. "Whereabouts?"

"Well," I said, "there's a lot of land over at the old place ain't in use."

Tom grins again. "Hi yi! You reckon Miss Jinny'd let us stay on the place long enough to make a crop?"

"I was thinking about trying it."

He stood there looking at me a minute. He scratched his head. He sat down. Then he stood up. "Mister Jim, I got a wife in there I believe can git along with Miss Jinny."

"You *got* something then," I said, "let me see her."

He called, "Frankie!" A girl came to the door. I didn't like her looks much. For one thing she had on lipstick and rouge. She was almost as tall as Tom and plump. And she had grey eyes and a bright skin. I never did like to see grey eyes in a nigger's head and a light-skin nigger always looks sassy to me. Still she had a good-natured smile and good nature was what I was after.

"Howdy, Frankie," I said; "whose girl are you?"

"I'm Old Man Gus Byars's daughter."

I was glad to hear that. Those Byars niggers are as respectable niggers as we've got in our county. Old Gus is the grandson of a white man, Mister Jim Parlow, who died right after the Civil War. He had four hundred acres of land and in his will he divided it up among his four mulatto sons, said, "They may be niggers, but they're damn fine boys." The rest of them had lost their land long ago, but old Gus still has fifty acres of his.

"Frankie," I said, "you know Miss Jinny Taylor?"

"Naw, suh, but Papa say he been knowin' her all his life."

"Can your papa get along with her?"

"Naw, suh, he say cain't nobody git along with her, black or white."

"Well, Frankie, Tom here says you can get along with her."

She laughed and ducked her head. "Folks generally likes me," she said.

Tom had sat down and was whittling on a stick. He'd been eyeing Frankie like he'd never seen her before and was trying to make up his mind about her. "Mister Jim, I believe she kin do it," he says finally in that soft voice of his.

"Well, what about it, Frankie?"

She was looking at Tom. I could tell from that look that they were a mighty loving pair. "Whatever Tom say," she told me.

"All right," I said, "we've done traded. Tom, you got a wagon?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, you be ready to move your stuff around New Year's."

"How you know Miss Jinny got an empty cabin?"

"I'll empty one."

He laughed. "Miss Jinny gwine have something to say to that."

I drove on over to Taylor's Grove. Got there about four o'clock. The front door was locked. I knocked on it a long while. Nobody came, but I could hear a radio going full tilt inside. Finally I shouted: "Mama! Mama!" (My mother died when I was little, so I always call my grandmother "Mama.") There was a lull in the music. The old lady came to the door. She is a small old lady with white hair and real pretty blue eyes. She wears grey gingham dresses, and, if it's cold, a little shawl. She stuck her face up against the screen. "Who is it? What do you want?"

"It's Jim," I told her. "Looks like you'd let me in after I drove all the way from Louisville to see you."

She opened the door mighty quick then. That old lady likes her own flesh and blood. She just can't stand to have them around long at a time.

"Jim!" she said, "Jim, I'm glad to see you."

"Why'n't you let me in then?" I asked, kidding her like I always did.

She said: "I heard somebody calling 'Mama,' but I thought it was the music. So many of these new songs have 'Mama' in them."

We went in and sat down and she told me all the news, mostly about a polecat had got in the henhouse and how the tenants were drying up her cows. After a while she asked me if I didn't want supper, the way people do when they expect you to say "no."

I told her I could eat a house. She looked kind of worried and then she said she wasn't figuring on eating any supper and had let the fire go out, but she could scramble me some eggs.

I kindled a fire in the stove and she fixed the eggs. But it took her a long time. I could see that she had broken a lot since the last time I was here. I thought it was time some of her own folks came to live with her.

After supper we went and sat in her room some more and listened to the radio. She is hell on politics and likes to know what is going on in Soviet Russia and China. I sat there looking at her and thinking how she'd kept us all in a stew for twenty or thirty years and would keep it up too till she died.

The way I figure it she isn't mean. She just has more curiosity than most folks. When she has anybody around her she just has to take 'em to pieces to see what makes 'em tick. And when she finds the weak spot she can't help probing it. I decided that if I was going to make a crop there, I'd try to stay away from the house as much as possible. I wasn't thinking much about the future in those days. Just to make one crop was all I figured on.

It was ten o'clock. She got up and said it was time to go to bed. I knew it was time to strike.

"Mama," I said, "how'd you like to have me come here and make a crop?"

She blinked. Her face worked like she was going to cry. But that old lady is game from the word go. "Well," she says, offhand, "I'll have to see what Phil says about it."

Uncle Phil is her brother, lives on the next farm. He is seventy years old and weighs two hundred pounds. He manages her business like he manages his own by sitting on the front porch and hollering at the hands.

"That's right," I told her, "we'll have to see what Uncle Phil says," and I went on upstairs to my old room and went to bed.

In the morning the old lady called Uncle Phil up and had a long talk with him. When she got through she said that Uncle Phil thought it was a good idea, but I'd have to talk over the details of the trade with him. I told her that was all right. I'd go over to see Uncle Phil that morning. Then I asked her if there was an empty cabin on the place, and when she said there was I told her I thought I'd try to get Tom Doty for a cropper. She said that was fine. She always liked Tom.

I thought it was about time to hit the big road, so I said I'd go on over and have my talk with Uncle Phil. I stopped at a country store and telephoned him. He must have heard I was there.

"What's the matter?" he sings out. "City got you down?"

I said that that was the size of it and told him I'd decided to make a crop at the Grove if he was agreeable.

He didn't say anything for a minute. Finally he said: "What you want to make a crop for? Why'n't you just go there and stay as long as you want to?"

"Listen," I told him. "I've been working eighteen hours a day in that garage, but I'm not ready for a nursemaid's job yet. And if I was I wouldn't start on Mama because she is hell on wheels and always has been."

"She don't mellow much," he said and then he gave a sigh. "Well, I reckon you got to get experience. Come on over in a few days and let me know how you make out."

I told him I would, and then I drove over to Bannerman's. Tom was sitting there on the doorstep. "Well, Tom," I said, "you can move in any time you want to."

Tom looked at me kind of funny. "How Miss Jinny gittin' along?" he asked in that polite voice of his.

I couldn't help but laugh. "She ain't broke any. But you said Frankie could handle her."

Tom laughed too. "That's right," he says.

They moved in three days later. Right then I came near making a big mistake. I went on down to the cabin that first morning and told Tom I reckoned Frankie'd better go up and see about working for Miss Jinny.

Tom looked upset like he always does when he has to go against white folks. Finally he says, "Mister Jim, it ain't *time* for Frankie to go to the house yit."

I told him all right. I was pretty busy for the next week or so, and I didn't have time to think about those niggers. All this time the old lady and I'd been having snacks off the kitchen table because it was too much trouble to light a fire in the dining room. Then one night when I rolled in for my scrambled eggs there was a fire going in the dining room and the table was all set. Frankie was in the kitchen standing over the stove and the old lady was ambling around telling her to do this and that. I beat it across the hall and waited till they rang the bell.

There was fried chicken and mashed potatoes and mustard greens. The chicken was fine and the mustard greens were cooked down like I like them, but I was waiting for the biscuits. Those old-fashioned housekeepers judge a cook by her bread. I picked one up looking kind of sour as if I expected the worst. It was light as a feather. I ate seven and I could have eaten more, but I was afraid the old lady would think I was dissatisfied with her cooking. We had some kind of pudding after that and I had a cup of good coffee. The old lady just picked at a chicken wing and she wouldn't drink any coffee for fear it would keep her awake. I went on across the hall and after the old lady had shown Frankie where to put things and bossed her about the dishwashing she came too. The old lady can't read much at night on account of her eyes, so she usually keeps the radio going till ten or eleven o'clock. She turned it on tonight same as usual. It was a talk on Soviet Russia, but it didn't seem to hold her. She turned it off and came over to the fire.

"That wife of Tom's came up today," she says, "and wanted to know if I wouldn't give her some milk. I told her I'd give her a gallon if she'd churn every day."

I put my paper down. "A gallon of milk! You know what that would cost you in town?"

"I ain't in town," the old lady says, "and ain't going to be if I keep my reason. The milk don't cost me anything and I'm glad for 'em to have it. I'm going to have Frankie get supper every night too. Of course I'll pay her extra for that."

"You don't really need her, do you?" I asked.

"No, I don't need her," the old lady says, "but when I find one that's willing to work I like to encourage 'em. So many of 'em won't do a hand's turn these days."

"Tom's a good man," I says, "but that Frankie don't look like much of a worker to me."

"She ain't overly strong," the old lady says, "but she's a good cook. All those Byars girls are good cooks."

Well, it went on like that. The way I figured it Frankie got paid for everything she did, but every day she'd do a little something extra that she hadn't been paid for and that kept the old lady feeling good. It was like they were running a race, with Frankie lagging on the turns so the old lady'd always keep in the lead. I got to worrying for fear they'd get all the chores done some day and Frankie'd have to pass the old lady.

There was one other thing worried me. Frankie was well named. She and Tom were just like the niggers in the song. They were willing to work, but loving came first. Every day after dinner Frankie would leave the dishes there on the table and she and Tom would head for the cabin. I was afraid the old lady'd notice and one day I took the bull by the horns. "Don't Frankie do any work in the afternoons?" I asked. "I came through the kitchen at one o'clock the other day and she'd left all her dinner dishes."

The old lady bridled up. "She goes to the cabin to rest a few minutes right after dinner. Good cooks are all like that. They get nervous, cooking. They have to cool off before they can eat anything."

I thought that as long as the old lady thought Frankie went to the cabin to cool off it was all right. I was pretty busy about that time. I don't know whether you ever raised any dark tobacco? A man ought not to go into it unless he wants to keep on the move. There's something to do every month in the year. We start burning out plant beds in February. In April it's time to take the canvas off and let the plants toughen up. Then, from the middle of April on through May and sometimes up to the first of June, you're on pins and needles waiting for a good season to set your tobacco. In our country we have some of the worst drouths in the spring. It's a hard proposition, setting tobacco when the ground isn't wet. You have to water every plant by hand and at that you're lucky if you get a stand.

We had some good rains in May, though, that year. I got my whole crop set on two rains. It was a fine stand and grew off pretty. By July my tobacco was waist-high, good, broad, spreading leaves too. She was ready to cut by the first of August. And I got the whole crop —ten thousand pounds of tobacco—cut and into the barn by August fifteenth. I felt pretty good about that, but I knew the hardest job was still ahead. It's the curing that tells the tale. You've got to put the smoke to her just right.

I'd been around tobacco barns a lot when I was a kid. I knew it was the devil of a job to get the right colour and finish on a leaf, but I wasn't worrying. Uncle Phil, for all he is so lazy, knows a lot about farming. I thought I only had to ask him when the time came.

I let my tobacco yellow for about a week before I started the fires: good chunks of hickory going in all four corners of the barn. I fired off and on, according to the season, for two weeks and then I called the old man and asked how much longer I ought to let the fires go.

"Hell," he says, "how do I know?"

"You been raising dark tobacco for fifty years," I told him. "You ought to know something about it."

"I know one thing," he says. "You'll house-burn it, sure as God made little apples, if you're let alone."

"Why'n't you come on over and show me how to fire it then?" I asked, knowing he wouldn't stir out of his house if half the barns in the country were burning down.

"I haven't cured a crop of tobacco in thirty years," he says.

"What do you do when firing time comes?"

"I get somebody that knows more about it than I do. Go on over and get Bud Asbury. He's a genius at it."

I drove over to the Asbury place. The first thing I saw was Old Man Asbury coming around the corner of the barn. He hadn't changed since I was a child: little old dried-up pea of a man rattling around in his overalls. I had to go in and howdy with old Mrs. Asbury before I could tell him what I wanted. He said Bud wasn't home right now, but he knew he'd be glad to help me. "All right, then," I said, "tell him to drop around tomorrow morning."

The old man looked kind of worried. He began all over again, saying Bud would be proud to help me—if he was home when the time came.

"Has he got a job somewhere?" I asked.

The old man said no, he didn't have any job.

"Well, don't he come home to sleep?"

The old man said the fact was that he hadn't seen Bud for three, four days. "You know he always was a rambling sort of a boy," he said.

"Well, I hope he'll ramble in here tomorrow morning," I told him, "or I'll have to get somebody else to cure that tobacco."

I went on home. Fifteen minutes after I got there Uncle Phil called up. "Have you read today's *Tobacco-Leaf?"* he asked.

I told him I'd been too busy to even take the paper out of the box.

"It's a good thing for you I read the paper," he said. "You better go on into town and get Bud Asbury out of jail."

"What's he in jail for?"

"For taking a man's car."

"Maybe he'd better stay in jail," I said.

The old man laughed. "Bud wouldn't steal a pin! You go on in there and tell the judge to turn Bud loose, that you need him to fire your tobacco. No, tell him I said I needed him to fire *my* tobacco. You better take some money. There's a drunk and disorderly charge too."

I went on in. The judge is a mighty pleasant old man. We howdied about the healths of both our families and then I told him what Uncle Phil said. "Well, now," he said, "I'm glad Phil can use him. That charge they've laid against Bud is just a piece of Bill Cain's foolishness."

Bill Cain is our prosecuting attorney. "Has he got it in for Bud?" I asked.

The judge explained that Bill Cain and Chief Patterson didn't exactly have it in for Bud. They were just worn out with him. It seems that Bud is a spree drinker, goes on a bat regularly every two or three months. He's also one of these blind drunks that never lose the use of their legs. This time he'd come out of a speakeasy and got in somebody else's car and drove off. The man who lost the car figured that Bud had it, because Bud's car was still sitting there in the square next morning. But he goes ahead just the same and swears out a warrant for Bud's arrest.

"And Bill Cain," the judge said testily, "was fool enough to serve it."

I told the judge I thought Uncle Phil would go on Bud's bond and in the meantime I'd take him home and sober him up with a little work. Tom said he'd drive Bud's car over to the Asburys'. I went by police court and paid Bud's fine and then went on over to the county jail.

Mr. Cleaver, the sheriff, and Bud and two niggers were sitting in the hall playing checkers. I told Mr. Cleaver what I wanted and he said all right, but he'd be obliged if I'd wait a few minutes: He and Bud were having a tournament with the niggers. "This boy, Billy," he says, pointing over his shoulder, "is the champion of Dunham's warehouse, but Bud and me are going to beat him if you'll give us time to finish this game."

I said all right and came in and watched them. Bud looked like he was still drunk or else he had a whale of a hangover. He sat up there stiff as a dead man, pushing those checkers around. He's a tall, lean fellow, about forty years old, one of the handsomest men I ever saw in my life, but with a kind of shattered look to him. It wasn't his features or the fact that he'd slept in his clothes. It was his eyes: He had that cold-looking blue eye you see sometimes in steady drinkers or sometimes in men that just don't give a damn. I decided I'd as soon not meet him when he was on one of his sprees.

They finished their game; the niggers beat 'em four out of six. The sheriff went in his office and telephoned Uncle Phil, then came back and told Bud good-bye.

"Don't stay away so long next time, Bud," he says, winking at me.

"They ain't goin' to be no next time, Mister Cleaver," Bud tells him.

As we drove home he gave me quite a lecture on drinking. The trouble, he said, was the liquor they sold you nowadays. It had got so he was almost a teetotaler, never knowing how the liquor would take him. Once he wanted me to stop the car. He was a mind to go back and beat up Lonny Cross who'd sold him the liquor. You'd think, he said, that you could go in a man's bar and have a drink friendly like, without him poisoning you. I told him he'd better leave Lonny Cross alone. He wasn't out of the woods yet on that larceny charge. He didn't seem worried about that. His idea was that the prosecutor must have been drunk when he let the man swear out the warrant. "Must have been. Mister Cain knows I wouldn't steal anybody's car. Why, a man needs his car to get around in."

We drove into the Grove about five o'clock. Tom had just got back from the Asburys'. I stopped by the barn a minute and then I took Bud on up to the house. I went in the back way like I always do when I've got mud on my boots. Frankie was frying some fish one of the boys had caught in Grinstead's pond. She said the old lady hadn't been feeling so well and was lying down.

The kitchen smelled mighty good with fish frying and coffee making. There was a table in the corner that Frankie always kept covered with a fresh cloth. I thought that long as the old lady wasn't coming in Bud and I might as well eat at that table, so I told Frankie not to bother making a fire in the dining room and then I went on in to see the old lady.

She was lying down listening to the radio. I stayed with her awhile and then I left her with the radio turned low and went back to the kitchen.

Tom had come in from the barn and was sitting on his bench back of the stove. Frankie had put a chair up to the table for Bud, and he was sitting there, smoking. I thought he must be needing a drink bad by this time; so I stepped into the dining room and found a pint bottle that was three quarters full of whisky. I divided it between the four of us, giving Bud a little the best of the deal.

He turned his glass up and downed her at one smack. "You ain't got any more of that?" he says.

I told him that as far as I knew it was the last in the house. "Miss Jinny and Frankie are teetotalers," I said.

Tom lets out a laugh. That was a joke we had. The old lady doesn't believe in using liquor except for medicine and cooking. "I just take it to ease the pain," she says, but one way or another she and Frankie get through with about a quart a week.

Frankie laughs too. "You can leave it around here all you want, Mister Jim. I ain't gwine tech it."

"I'll drink your share, Frankie," Bud says.

He was looking different from what he had when he came in. Those funny blue eyes were shining and he had colour in his cheeks. If I hadn't known there wasn't any liquor in the house I'd have thought he was starting on another drunk.

Frankie was taking her fish off the stove. We drew up our chairs. Her coffee was good that night and we had a dozen of those little pond perch fried a golden brown. And every time we turned around

Frankie was there with more batter bread. I told her I believed it was the best she'd ever made.

She had just handed me a piece and was going on to Bud. He looked up at her. "Yeah," he said, "and them's mighty pretty little yellow hands that made it."

Nobody said anything for a minute. Before I knew it I'd looked over at Tom. He was sitting on a bench by the stove and he slewed around as sudden as if he'd been pulled by a string. His eyes popped open and fastened on Bud's face. Then he realized that I was looking at him and he ducked his head and began eating again, real slow.

I looked back at Bud. He looked back as unconcerned as you please. I kept on looking at him. I made my voice real hard. "Eat up, Bud," I said, "it's time we were getting to the barn."

"That tobacco ain't goin' to walk off," he says, and laughs and looks up at Frankie, who was still standing there by the table.

I pushed my chair back. "I'm ready now," I said; "I'd be obliged if you'd come with me."

He put one last piece of corn bread in his mouth and reached for his hat. We went out the back way and started down to the barn. We hadn't gone far before Bud said he'd have to stop a minute. I thought he had to see a man about a dog and walked on. I hadn't been in the barn more than ten minutes before he came in. And in a little while Tom came too.

We set to work building up the fires. You can't have flames going any length of time. You've got to have red-hot embers, and keeping a hickory log at that stage takes doing. But Tom was good at it as Bud remarked.

Bud seemed to be feeling better and better. He went over the barn, pinching a leaf here and there. He said the tobacco was in exactly the right order. Seems it's all a matter of draft. If you have too much draft the lighter edges of the leaf'll dry out too quick and set in whatever colour they happen to have at the time instead of making the nice brown everybody wants.

He talked a lot about house-burning. Said there wasn't any use of anybody house-burning their tobacco if they kept their minds on it. Said it comes from letting your fires die out too sudden. That vapor'll stop right in the middle of the barn and condense into sweat. She's gone then, he said, and can't anything bring her back. But the nearer you can bring her to house-burning without burning her the prettier she'll be.

About twelve o'clock we got up to go up to the house for more coffee. Tom got up too. I'd intended to leave him there to watch the fires, but something about the way he looked made me change my mind.

The three of us started back to the house, but Bud dropped off as we were crossing the yard. Seemed to me he was having a lot of sudden calls that night and I so remarked to Tom.

Tom laughed, kind of surly. "He done gone to git him some more of that wine. Whilst you in talking to Old Miss he went in the dining room and got him a whole jug of blackberry wine."

"Why'n't you stop him, Tom?"

Tom laughed again. "Mister Jim, you know I couldn't head Mister Bud Asbury off when he wants to do anything."

"Is he mean?" I asked. "Has he got the reputation of being mean?"

"He's hard to head," Tom said. "The jedge or anybody that has the handlin' of him'll tell you that."

Bud was already sitting up to the table when we came in. "Come on," he called, like it was his house and not mine. "Come on and git some of these good sandwiches Frankie made us."

I could see he'd taken on another load of the old lady's wine. He kept laughing most of the time, and once when Frankie was passing something he made a swipe low with his hand and caught hold of her ankle.

Frankie was quick. She flopped over against the table, spilling half the sandwiches. " 'S'cuse *me,* Mister Bud," she says, "I mighty nigh fell on you."

"It don't make a bit of difference," Bud says genially. "You fall all over me if you want to."

I was stumped. I've been around a good bit. I know plenty of men that think nothing of sleeping with nigger women, but I never saw one in the act of going after a nigger woman before. It gave me a funny feeling. And I was worried about Tom. Tom is a boy that thinks a lot of his raising. I don't reckon he'd ever spoken an out-of-the-way word to a white person in his life—until that night.

Bud finished eating and got up and went out on the porch, to get a drink of water, he said. He was out there a few minutes and then he came to the door. "Frankie," he called, "step here a minute."

Frankie jumped up quick like she always does when there's any waiting on to do and then she must have realized what he wanted, for she stopped short and just stood there, staring at him.

Tom was getting up from his bench behind the stove. He kept on coming till he was right in the middle of the floor. Then he stopped. "Mister Bud," he said, "that's my woman."

I saw his hand go up, slow, over his jumper. He wears one of these old-fashioned cutting razors slung there on a piece of string.

I stepped out between them. I looked him straight in the eye. "Tom!" I said, "*Tom*! You sit down there behind that stove."

That nigger looked at me like he'd never seen me before. Then his eyes changed. "Yas, sir," he said, kind of dazed. "Yas, sir, that's what I was going to do."

I looked at Frankie. I was mad through by that time and it seemed to me that more'n half of it was her fault. Those high yellows just can't help bridling if a man looks at 'em. "Frankie," I said, "do you want to go out on that porch with Mister Asbury?"

She was crying. "Naw, suh, I don't want to go out there with no white man."

"Well, go on over there and sit down by Tom and try behaving yourself for a change."

She went off sniffling and I walked over and stood in front of Tom. "Tom," I told him, "I'm going out there to see Mister Asbury and I don't want any niggers mixing in. You understand?"

"Yas, sir," he said, keeping his eyes on the floor.

I stepped outside. Bud was walking around in the yard. It was dark out there when you stood away from the window. The fool thought I was Frankie. He made a dive at me. "Come on, honey," he says, "let's you and me take a walk."

I caught him by the arm. "You're going to take a walk," I says, "but you ain't going with Frankie. Now, Bud, when you get through that gate you hit the big road and you keep going till you strike your old man's house."

We were passing the window. I could see the surprised look on his face. "Now, Jim," he says, "what have I done to get you down on me like that?"

"You been making passes at Frankie right in my kitchen," I told him. "I ain't going to have it."

"All right," he says sadly, "if that's the way you feel," and he goes off across the yard. He hadn't gone but a few steps before he stopped. "I ain't goin'," he says, sullen like a child. "I ain't ever started curing a crop of tobacco that I didn't finish it. I'm goin' right back to the barn."

I saw there was nothing else for it; so I tackled him. I caught him around the knees and we both went down together in the mud. He tried to get up, but I shifted my hold and got him around the chest. He broke my hold without half trying and the next thing I knew he had me flat on my back in the mud. "I hate to do this," he says, "but you don't seem to have no sense tonight."

I didn't say anything and after a minute he let me go and got up. I jumped to my feet and went at him again. This time I knocked him over backwards, but he turned quick as a cat and had me with a leg hold.

We clinched two or three times after that. I never could break his hold, but he'd let me go just so I could come at him again. His blood was up now and he was enjoying himself. As for me I was beginning to think that if anybody hit the big road that night it'd be me.

The last time he threw me plumb over his head. I landed so hard I thought my neck was snapped in two. I lay there a second trying to get my breath. Then I realized that my left hand was hurting like blazes. I moved it. Something rattled: I'd landed against a pile of tobacco sticks. I took another good breath and got up with one of those oak sticks in my hand.

The kitchen door opened, real soft. Tom came out. "Mister Jim," he called, "you want me to come out there and help you tie up Mister Bud?"

"You come out here," I said, "and you'll get the worst beating you ever got in your life."

I walked over and let Bud have that solid oak, whang, on the side of his head. He rocked a little like cattle do when you fell them and then he started toward me. But my legs were still good. I jumped to the side, quick. "Bud," I said, "I'm going to raise knots on the other side of your head if you don't hit the big road."

I don't believe he knew what had hit him till that minute. He stopped and fingered his head and then came at me. I let him have it again, a harder lick this time. It knocked him down, but not out. That boy's head was hard as bow-dock. After a bit he got on his feet.

He stood there, staggering; then he says, real polite, "All right, if that's the way you feel," and starts for the gate.

I went on in the house. "Come on, Tom," I said, "we better get back to the barn."

We took turns the rest of the night sleeping and firing. But we had let the fires go plumb out while we were having the ruckus and the barn had got cold. We got the fires going good again and kept a steady fire the rest of the night and the wind had changed so it was making the draft just the way you want it. But before I left the barn, towards daybreak, I pulled down a leaf and felt it. It wasn't what you'd call dry but it had lost that kid glove feeling. Tobacco has a skin just like a woman's. Once that stretchiness is gone out of a leaf, it's gone and there ain't anything can bring it back.

Daylight was coming in through the open door. I looked at the tiers of tobacco hanging all the way up to the roof. Ten thousand pounds and if it had been cured right we'd have got thirty cents for every pound of the prime leaf, but now we'd do well to get fifteen.

Tom was just getting up from a pile of sacks, feeling his leg that had gone to sleep. "Tom," I said, "take a look up there."

"What is it?" he says, "old 'possum or something on the rafters?"

"It ain't any 'possum," I said. "But last night we had nineteen hundred and sixty dollars hanging up over us. Now we ain't got but nine hundred and thirty."

Tom looked at the tobacco and then he looked at me. He poked his lip out. "That Mister Bud Asbury," he said, "I don't care how good he can cure tobacco. He better stay away from my woman."

I didn't say anything. A man has to fight if somebody tries to take his woman. But I couldn't stand by and watch that nigger carve Bud up. It struck me as a funny business. Always has.

AMERICA'S MYTHOLOGY

Mark Van Doren

America's great gods live down the lane;
Or up the next block blend their bulk with stone;
Or stand upon the ploughed hills in the rain;
Or watch a mountain cabin left alone.

Gigantic on the path, they never speak.
Unwitnessed, they are walked through every hour.
They have an older errand; or they seek
New sweets beyond the bound of mortal sour;

Or love the living instant, and so minded,
Bestride the lesser lookers—who can say?
There is no man has seen them but was blinded;
And none has ever found them far away.

America's tall gods are veteran here:
Too close for view, like eagles in the eye;
Like day itself, impalpable and clear;
Like absolute noon's air, unflowing by.

They are the first of all. Before the grey,
Before the copper-colored, they were moving
Green-brown among the deep trees: deep as they,
As curious of the wind, as tempest-loving;

As shaggy-dressed, as head-proud; and in summer,
As lazy. So they lived. And so they still
Live everywhere, unknown to the newcomer,
Whom genially they watch. And so they will

To earth's end, feeding on their ancient grain,
Wild wheat tips, and barbed rice tops, and the meat
Of mast whereover richest leaves have lain;
Although they pick the tame fields too, and eat

With fathers at the heads of merry tables;
And sleep on beds for change, and sit with talkers.
Whence all their lore; for man's least deeds are fables
To these old-natured gods, these ancient walkers.

STRANGE TOWN GOD

He is the one that meets us where the first
Small houses, dark and poor, lead into light;
And tells us how the features, best and worst,
Make something like a face in country night.

He is the only townsman who would know.
For the lean rest it is familiar chaos.
His love is older; is a breath to blow
Strict lines from curb to roof till patterns stay us:

Till pausing by the dusk hotel, we count
Street lamps, store fronts, red jail; and farther on,
The first white house again, where the maples mount
That high east hill our road goes up—has gone

Each night like this since who knows when? Who'll say?
The sprawled god never answers in his pride.
The question is enough. And shows the way
To hot hamburgers, coffee, and thin fried.

COMPASS GOD

Which way this forest faces;
How sharp we angled there;
When the wind struck us, came it
Slantwise or square?

At home now it is certain—
The hay door—perfect West?
Our cousin in the spare room:
Will he rest?

He said he had it backwards:
Due South for simple North:
Turned full around, no matter
How he went forth.

There is a tall one watches
And pities our poor eyes:
Except that some are knowing;
Are needle-wise;

Were Eastward set when Phosphor
Whitened the oldest dawn;
And are the eyes he blesses,
In babe or fawn.

SICKBED GOD

His body wreathes the room like draughts
Of air, of tender air, and wafts
Both pity in and envy—both
The terror and the nothing loath.

This weakness, the uncertain eyes,
The back that will not rest and rise,
The fingers—they are strange as fear,
Though he has practiced it all year;

And would have faltered at the heart
Had he but known the helpless part;
Had he but mastered how the breath
Refuses what it can to death.

The wonder bends him to a cheek;
To the seen bone, and to the bleak
Burned-over forehead; then the stare—
At which there have been days the air

Sorrowed with him, and the scent
Of older weeping came and went;
And he lay visible, as though
A current should forget to flow.

GARDEN GOD

He is the sun-white one that loves
High noon in the bean rows, or as you tie
Gourd tendrils fenceward comes like doves
And will not let your memory lie—

Pecks it till it lifts and wings
In bright near circles by him; floats
Like fire above your forehead; flings
Thought-atoms down, minute as motes,

In front of your eyes, that mingle green
With brown for study, and sift the clods
For such clear answers as are seen
Not heard—so goes it with the gods.

So too with gardeners when the sun
Pours silence past them, and they hoe
Like men of old—young though to one
Who still was older, and would know

Why all at once, nobody by,
They smiled and pulled it, or at the bend
Of some hot corn row looked on high
And frowned, reflecting; then the end.

HORSE GOD

They are newcomers too, the bent-necked
Pullers, the head-high starers, the stampers
Of flies: new legs, new tails in the hay.
So he picks a red foal as it scampers,

Breasting the flowers, and all a wet summer
Follows its misty feet; till cold days
Flatten the grass once more; till frost
Barrens the world; till bones of the old days

Show in the sod, and a wind reminds him
Of animals lost and gone—yet ruffles
The coat of his rusty yearling; blows
All morning between the two, and muffles

The whinny that was a meadow's music;
Mingles the fencewire's hum with a neighing
Shriller and farther away. So he blinks
And follows the hoof-thuds closer, staying

Warm by a flank, wind-tossed at a foretop;
Turns, and approves the eyes; and wanders,
Free of his charge, all day—but whirls
At sunset to that sound again, and ponders.

BIRD GOD

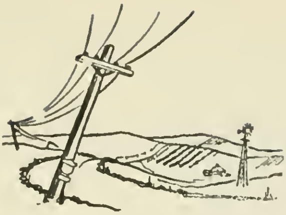
His study is the way we stand and peer,
Foot-lifted, toward a thicket where the shade,
Sewn suddenly with needle notes, declares
The wing most wild, the feathers most afraid.

Or openly at evening when the swifts
Cut the same blue as ever, when the crows
Rip the last hour of silence and subside;
He watches how we listen, and he slows

To a last clumsy pity; leans and waits;
Leans closer still. But still our birds are strange.
Still are we distant from them, and no arm
Of any wishful man can wave exchange.

He walked among them, numbering their beaks,
When the first forest shed them to the sky;
When the first eagle spiralled, and the owl's
Aimed silence wrapped a midnight mouse's cry.

Finches from his wrist looked down for seed,
And dropping to the grass heads picked and ate.
As long ago as ravens—but he pauses,
And pities once again our after date.



The Buck in the Hills

Walter Van Tilburg Clark

I LEFT the peak about two o'clock, drank the very cold, shale-tasting water coming from under last winter's snow in the notch, went on down, and then south through the marshy meadow, already in shadow from the col, the grass yellowing and the sod stiffening from the fall nights, so that I could walk straight across and feel only the first solidity and then a slight give which didn't spring back. It was strange in the meadows, walking in the shadow, but with the sky still bright blue, as in the middle of the afternoon, and the sunlight, when I stopped to look back at the peak, just beginning to look late. It was chilly in the shadow, too, but I didn't hurry. The peak was sacred to me, the climb was pilgrimage, and five years is a long time. I had been very happy all day, climbing with the sun on my neck and shoulders, and I was very lonely and happy now. I took my time, and looked at everything, and remembered a lot, and would have yodeled sometimes, but the quiet was better.

I climbed over the big rock barrier, which a million winters had cracked into terraces, saw the dry, shriveled clumps of leaves and single dead stems in the cracks, and remembered times I had come up there in the summer, which is spring at that height, and seen it pouring with green, like cascades, and lighted by flowers. I remembered the dark girl who knew all the flowers, and who, when I bet her she couldn't find more than thirty kinds, found more than fifty, and remembered how we had eaten our pocket lunch dry, in a niche on the east side of the peak, out of the strong wind we could hear among the rocks and more heavily in the notch below. We couldn't see it then, but the image was new in our minds of the big basin to the west, with its rolling of dark-green to pale-blue heavily timbered hills, and the wide, dark-blue flat of Tahoe, rough with wind and jointed exactly into all the bays and coves, and the little lakes at different heights around it, also fitted like single pieces into a relief puzzle. In front of us, way down, squared with fields and pencilled by the straight roads, was the chain of ranching valleys, and then the lesser, burned mountains rolling to the east, and in the far northeast just a sky-colored sliver of Pyramid Lake showing through the last pass. I remembered that the clouds that day had gone all around the horizon in a narrow band, flat underneath, all at exactly the same level, with clear sky between them and the mountains, and with their tops standing up in little, firm bosses and domes, and not a single cloud in the field of sky above them, so that we sat high up in the center of a great circle of distant cloud. This seemed to mean something, and gave our thoughts, and the big arch of the world we looked at, a different quality that made us uneasy but happy, too, the way I was now.

I went on through the sparse trees and the rocks over two ridges, and could see from them, and from the little valley between, the rock castle at the end of the high col to the west, where I had eaten at noon another time, when I was alone, and then stayed for two hours to watch a hawk using the wind over the hollow to the west, feeling myself lift splendidly when he swooped up towards me on the current of the col, and then balanced and turned above.

I was feeling like that when I got back to the little grassy lake where I'd left my pack. The pack was still there all right, under the bench nailed between two of the three trees on the hump at the farther side. Beyond the three trees, which were stunted and twisted by wind, I could see the wall of the col, very dark now, with a thin gold sky above it. Besides the bench, there was a pine-bough bed and a rock fireplace in the shelter of the trees. I hadn't made them, just found them there, but in the dusk the place gave me the hawk lift again. I had the night here alone, and another day in the mountains. That was a lot. And I had already stacked my firewood; brought it down that morning from the east slope.

I went around to the camp side and stood looking at the lake, thinking about swimming before I made a fire and ate. It was cold, and the water would be cold too. The lake was really just a pool of snow water, with no outlet, and no regular inflow, shallow enough so the dead grasses showed up through the edges. But I like that kind of clean, cold feeling, and it had been warm climbing in the middle of the day. I peeled off, and stood liking the cold on my body, and the frozen, pebbly earth under my feet, and then, when I went nearer the edge, the wiry grass. It was very still in the valley, and the water reflected, exactly and without break, the mountains and the last of that thin, yellow light. I got that lift again. This time I would take it out. I ran splashing till I was thigh-deep, and then rolled under. The water was even colder than I had expected, and hardened my whole body at once. For a minute or two I swam rapidly in circles in the small center that was deep enough. Then I was all right, and could roll easily, and even float looking up. The first stars were showing above the ridge in the east. I let go a couple of bars of high, operatic sounding something. It came back at me from under the col, sounding much better, sweet and clear and high. God, I was happy. This was the way I liked it, alone, and clean cold, and a lot of time ahead. I rolled over to dive and start one more fast turn, when I heard a yodel that wasn't an echo.

I stood up, feeling the cold rim of the water around my chest, and even in the dusk could see the shape of the man coming over the hump and down towards the lake. When he was part way down, I could tell by the walk, a little pigeon-toed and easy, giving at the knees all the time, that it was Tom Williams. He had his pack on, and his rifle over one shoulder, with a thumb in the sling, the way Tom always carried it. The remainder of ecstasy went out of me. I'd rather have Tom than almost anyone I know for outside company, but I didn't want anybody now. And Tom meant Chet McKenny, and I didn't want Chet now or any other time. Chet was a big-boned, tall Scotchman, probably ten years older than either Tom or me, with grey in his stiff hair. He had a kind of stubborn originality that wouldn't use a joke somebody else had told, but he couldn't make a good one; so he was laughing all the time over bad jokes of his own. But that wasn't what I disliked, though it got tiresome. What I didn't like about McKenny was deeper than stupidity. You saw it when you saw that his eyes were still watching you when he laughed; you were always on guard against McKenny.

The three of us had come up in Tom's car, and they'd left me at the summit meadows. They were going on over to the flat to start a deer hunt. I was supposed to have today and tomorrow and then be back out at the meadows by sunset to wait for them.

Tom came down to where I'd dropped my clothes, and unslung his rifle and pack and put them down.

"Cold?" he asked. He didn't have to speak loudly.

"Plenty," I said.

I kept looking for Chet to come over the rise too.

Tom peeled off and came in, but slowly, and then just lying out and letting himself sink under. He came up slowly, too, as if the water weren't cold at all, and just stood there, not even rubbing himself. There was something wrong.

"Where's Chet?" I asked. It would even be pleasant, with a fire after supper, to have Tom to talk to, if he was alone.

"That bastard," Tom said. Then he let himself down into the water again, and came up a few feet farther off, his thin, blond hair streaming down and the springy, blond mat on his big chest holding a few drops.

"He won't be here, anyway," he said; "so you don't have to worry."

He began to swim hard, and I took another turn, to get the blood stirring again. Then we walked up out of the water. Tom didn't say anything more, and I didn't either. I knew it would come. Tom doesn't often talk much, except about engines, but this was different. It was working in him, hard. He went up to his pack, and I could see the muscles in his heavy white shoulders working while he hunted in it. He got out a towel and threw it to me. Then he went back down to the water, and I saw he had a cake of soap in his hand. But he didn't bathe. I stood there wiping off and watching him, and he just bent over in the shallows and washed his hands. He washed them hard, three or four times, rinsing them between. That was queer for Tom. He was an auto mechanic, ran a little shop of his own, and he'd long ago given up hoping to have his hands really clean. Often on trips like this he'd go two or three days without washing them at all.

He still didn't say anything, though, when he came up; just took the towel from me and began to wipe himself slowly.

It felt good to be in the warm flannel shirt and cords again, and shod heavily. Maybe that's even the best feeling, the cold that makes you feel thin and single, with no waste matter, but beginning to get warm. I lit a cigarette with stiff fingers, and saw against the match flame how dark it was getting. The cigarette tasted very good too. I was all set to be happy again, if Tom was right.

Tom didn't talk while he was dressing, or while we went up to the camp, or while he was cooking and watching the coffee and I was putting some new boughs and the sleeping bags on the bed. The bed was a good one, wide enough for three, and in a pit a foot deep. I went down to the lake to get two cans of beer out of the water. They're a lot of weight to carry in a pack, and I'd thought maybe I was pampering myself when I'd put them in, one for each evening. Now I was glad I'd brought them. When I came back up with them, Tom was just letting the things cook, and standing away from the fire, looking at the stars over the valley and in the little lake.

"This is a swell place," he said in an easier voice. "Gee, I haven't been in here for years. I'd forgot what a swell place it was."

Then I knew it was going to be all right, once he got around to telling me, and I had to sing a little while I put the beers between roots and took the eggs and beans off the fire; not loudly, but just about like the crackling of the fire.

When he came back and sat down on the bench, the light on his face with its fine mouth and big, broken nose and blue eyes, and its hard weather lines, he looked at me because I was singing, and I could see he was still thinking, but not feeling the same way about it.

When we'd started to eat, I asked, "How did the hunting go?"

"Don't you worry," Tom said. "I didn't get anything. I didn't even get a shot. I didn't see a thing."

He looked closed up again, as he had when he came into the water. He finished his beans, staring into the fire. Then he said suddenly, "That McKenny is a first-rate bastard."

"What's he done now?" I asked.

Tom looked right at me for a moment, as if he'd start, but then he said, "Oh, hell, let it go."

He got up and went down to the edge of the lake slowly, and after a moment I saw his match flare, and then, every now and then, the fire point of his cigarette moving.

I'd never seen Tom let anything eat on him like that before. He made up his mind very hard about what was wrong and what was right, especially about people, but he did it carefully, and he was usually gentle about it, even afterwards. It was the first time I'd heard him speak out like that. Whatever happened, it must have been pretty bad.

Well, I was sure now that McKenny wasn't coming. I stopped thinking about it, put more wood on the fire, and lay on my back where the light wouldn't be in my eyes. Then I could see the silhouette of the col, where it walled out the stars, and the big peak glimmering in the starlight in the north. The size of the place, and the cold quiet, came back to me, and I was happy again.

I'd forgotten about Chet when Tom came back up and sat down on the bench. He stared at the ground for a moment. Then he looked across at me.

"You always thought so, didn't you?"

"Thought what?"

"That Chet McKenny was a first-rate bastard?"

I didn't like to say so.

"All right," Tom said. "I guess he is, at that."

He didn't say anything more; so I sat up.

"Have a beer?"

"No, thanks."

I had to get him started.

"Did Chet get anything?" I asked.

Tom looked at me hard.

"Yeah, he got one, all right, a good big buck, better than two-twenty, I'd guess. Ten points." He looked down.

Then he looked up again, and said suddenly, and loudly for that place, "You know what that bastard did? He—" but stopped.

"He what?"

"No," Tom said. "I'll tell you the way it was. Maybe I'm wrong.

"I worked down south, towards the lake meadows. I didn't see a thing all day; not even a doe; not even a fresh track or droppings. I figured it had been worked over and got disgusted and went back to the flat in the afternoon to get some sleep. I was washing up at the brook, and when I stood up and turned around, there was this big buck, a mule, on the edge of the trees across the flat. Even from there I could tell he was a big one, and I cussed, because there was my rifle up against a tree thirty yards from me, and the buck had spotted me. You know, his head was up and right at me, and those big ears up too. He was trying the wind. I figured if I moved he'd be back in those trees before I could take a step. So I held it. After a while he let his head down, way low, and began to go along the edge of the flat towards the pass. Then I saw there was something the matter with him. He wasn't using his left front leg; just bucking along on the other one, in little jumps. He was tired out, too, stopping every few jumps and taking the wind again, and then letting his head drop that way, like he couldn't hold it up. I figured somebody'd made a bad shot. I started for the gun. He saw me then, but he was so far gone he didn't even care, just kept hopping and resting. Then I didn't know whether I wanted him or not. Only I might as well, if his leg was really busted.

"I was standing there on the edge of the flat, wondering, when I heard this yell. It was Mac, coming down through the trees. He yelled at me to head the buck off. Your lousy shot then, I thought.

"When I went right out at the buck, it tried to hurry. I yelled at Mac did he want me to finish it, and he yelled at me, hell no, it was his buck. The buck stood there with his head up when we yelled; he didn't try to do anything.

"I don't know. It made me mad. But it was Mac's buck. I started to work around so as not to hurry it any more than I had to. Mac was working along in the timber to get right above him. When I got around in front, we worked in closer, and then the buck saw us both, and just stopped and stood there. He was shivering all over, and didn't have any fight left in him. I could see now that he'd been hit in the leg, right up against the body. The blood was mostly dried on black, but there was a little fresh blood coming out all the time too. The bad leg was all banged up from being dragged on things, too, and he was soaked with sweat on the hindquarters and under the throat, and making cotton at the muzzle."

Tom stopped.

Then he said, "It's funny the way they look at you like that. I don't know. There wasn't anything, no fight, no panic, no hope, no nothing. He just looked at you. But you couldn't move. They got such big eyes. I don't know."

Tom kicked at a stone with his boot.

"Well, anyway, I couldn't move. But Mac could. He came up close behind. He had his cap on the back of his head and he was grinning. He said wasn't it a nice one. Ten points, he said.

"When he talked, the buck got going again, that same way. It was headed across the meadow towards the camp. I got ready to finish it, but Mac yelled at me to mind my own damn business and let it go or he'd damn well lather hell out of me. You know the way he does, grinning, but mad as the devil. I asked him what he thought he was doing, but he said that was his business, and to mind my own.

"The buck was going so slow you could pass it walking; had to wait on it. And it stopped two or three times. Mac could have killed it a long time before it got to the flat; I was sure of that. I began to think he wanted to take it in alive, or something. But it wasn't that."

Tom stopped talking and sat there.

"No?" I said.

"No," Tom said. "When the buck stopped near where we'd had the fire, Mac said that was good enough, like he was pleased, and unslung his rifle and took mine, too, and stood them up against a tree. Then he told me to hold the buck's head."

After a moment Tom went on again.

"I don't know why I did it. I just did. I never felt that way before. I guess I thought he was going to operate, as near as I thought anything. He just said to hold it, and I did, like I was in a daze. The buck kind of backed a little, and then, when I had hold of his antlers, he stood still; didn't make a move. Holding onto the antlers, I could feel him shivering all over, you know, like putting your hand on a telephone pole. Mac had his skinning knife out.

"'Hold his head up,' he said.

"He was kind of leaning over and looking at the bullet hole when he said it, and I did.

"Then all of a sudden he leaned down on the buck's neck with one hand, and slit its throat wide open with the knife in the other. Leaning on it that way, he put all his weight on the buck's one leg, and the buck fell over front, and I didn't get out of the way fast enough. It knocked me onto my knees, too, and the blood came out all over my hands and arms. It kept coming, in big spurts; there was an awful lot of it. I don't know."

Tom got out a cigarette and lit it. I didn't have anything to say. The story made a difference, though, as if it were a lot darker all at once, and we were farther away from other people than before, and there were things alive in the rocks, watching us. I noticed there was a wind coming up too, but didn't think about it, just heard it in the trees as if it had been going all the time.

"It's funny," Tom said. "When the buck got pushed down, it stretched way out; you know. Its muzzle was right in my face, and it blew. It made a little spray of blood, but it had a sweet smelling breath, you know, like a cow's. And then all that blood came out, hot."

Finally he asked me, "You know what Mac said?"

"No."

"Well, he laughed like hell when the buck pushed me over, and then he said, 'I never take more than one shot,' and then he laughed again.

"I was mad enough, I guess. I told him it was a hell of a shot, and he said two inches to the right would of killed him, and pointed at the hole, and laughed again and said hell, it was perfect. The bullet had busted the joint all to pieces. There were splinters sticking out where they'd worked through."

I was looking at Tom now.

"You mean he meant to?" I asked.

"That's right," Tom said. "He thought he was real clever. He boasted about it. Said he'd spotted the buck way up in that little meadow under the castle rocks; what's its name? The buck was on the north edge of the meadow, and up wind of him, what wind there was. He said he figured it all out, that it was eight miles back to camp, and the buck was a big one. He couldn't see carrying it all that way, so he just laid down there on the edge of the timber, to make his shot good, and waited till the buck was broadside to him, and then busted that foreleg. Said he'd never made a better shot, that it was a hundred and fifty yards if it was an inch, and uphill. He was set up about that shot."

"Well," I said letting out my breath.

"Yes," Tom said.

"He told me all about how he drove it, too," he said angrily. "How it kept trying to run at first, and falling over so he had to laugh, and then how it tried to turn on him, but couldn't stand it when he got close, and what a hell of a time he had driving it out of a couple of manzanita thickets where it tried to hole up. Then he figured that if he stayed off it, it would keep going steadier, and it did.

"So, I guess you were right," Tom said, making it a question.

"I didn't think he was that bad," I said. "You have to keep it up a long time to do a thing like that."

"He was still going strong," Tom said. "Only excited and talking a lot.

"Like I am now," he added.

I didn't want to ask. I figured anything he'd done wasn't enough. But I still looked at Tom.

"No," he said. "You don't have to worry. I didn't touch him.

"I don't know," he said doubtfully. "I wanted you to know the way it was, first."

"He had it coming to him," I said. But I was scared, so I nearly laughed when Tom told me.

"I told him if he'd been saving himself so careful, he could damned well carry his buck home, and I left him there."

"I'd like to have seen his face," I said.

"I didn't even look at him," Tom said. "I just put my things into the car and got out.

"He knew better than to say anything, too."

"Well," I said finally, "I wouldn't say you were too hard on him."

"No," Tom said. "But he'll try to bring that buck out."

"Sure," I agreed, "he wouldn't let it go if it was killing him."

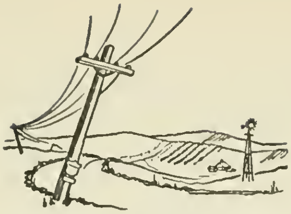
Tom heeled his cigarette out carefully and said, "You wouldn't care to go up the mountain again tomorrow, would you?"

"Sure I would," I told him. "Now *you* quit worrying. He had it coming to him."

Tom said he was going to take another swim, and we undressed by the fire, and went down together, and came back up wet. I felt very cold then, and the wind was stronger. But we piled more wood onto the fire, so it threw shadows of the three trees way up the hump, and when we'd dried off it felt so good we didn't get dressed, but just put on our shorts and stayed close to the fire.

"I'll have that beer now," Tom said. He was cheerful.

In the morning the wind was down, but it was snowing. We couldn't even see the mountain. I felt worse about the buck than I had when Tom told me, and kept thinking about it. We packed up and went back down trail, single file and not talking. Snow makes a hush that's even harder to talk in than the clear silence. There was something listening behind each tree and rock we passed, and something waiting among the taller trees down slope, blue through the falling snow. They wouldn't stop us, but they didn't like us, either. The snow was their ally.



The Passing of the Timber Beast

James Stevens

THE harbor lights glowed through a fine drizzle as the *J. N. Teal,* the last of the old stern-wheeler fleet to carry cargo and passengers between Portland and The Dalles, churned into her West Side dock. With my blanket roll at my feet I stood by the rail and stared, trying to see what life was beyond the lights along the river. There were only shadows, black bulks of buildings, streaked faintly with yellow gleams. That, for the present, was enough to give me a cold, sinking sensation in the pit of my stomach and make my heart thump as the stern-wheeler was moored. At last I was in Portland. Here I was, alone in a big city. Here I would realize my dream of a new life of labor. Of that I was still certain. No more grading camps! I was through with the drudgery of railroad building. So long, mules and scrapers! From here I was going to the tall timber and live the life of a bully logger!

"Where do the loggers hang out here in Portland?" I asked a deck hand.

"The skidroad," he said shortly.

"Where's that?" I asked, with a blush for my ignorance.

"It's—hell, I ain't got time to give directions. Just go ashore and ask anybody which way's Ericsen's."

A loafer ashore pointed the way to Third and Burnside Streets. I plodded along the water front in the rain of the March night. The low clouds were black above the dim street lamps. The steel frames of the drawbridges over the Willamette looked naked and cold in the river lights and shadows. I knew I was on the skidroad when I came upon gangs of men before the blackboards of employment offices—"slave markets," I soon learned to call them—on Second Street. Most of the men wore mackinaws or short mackinaw shirts, "tin pants" or overalls stagged just below the knee, and calked boots. Woods jobs were scarce. Many of the loggers were on the bum. An old-timer struck me for the price of a bed. I had only a few dollars, but I offered to buy him a beer. Over the glasses in a corner saloon he was free with information about logging camps. The best one in the Northwest for a young man of seventeen who wanted to get a start as a logger was Paul Bunyan's, he said. Yes, sir, I certainly ought to inquire around everywhere and try to get a chance in Paul Bunyan's camp.

Two years among the team hands of Idaho and Montana had left me fairly wise, and I had some notion that the old logger was stringing me along, though I didn't doubt that there really was a famous logger named Paul Bunyan. I only suspected that this old-timer was trying to work me for some more beers. So I quit him and headed for Ericsen's up the street, where all flush loggers foregathered to blow in their hard-earned wages.

At that time—1910—Ericsen's Saloon had a world-wide fame. To me the grand and glittering barroom was a fairy tale come to life. My imagination exaggerated every detail of the scene. The brown and shining bar curved away from the door and ran down a room that seemed as big as a circus tent. Row after row of card tables, each one crowded with gambling men, reached into corners that appeared mysterious and far in the smoke drift. A score of slot machines lined one wall. From somewhere came a sound of piano and fiddle music. A mellow glow swam about me. I was enchanted as I moved toward the bar.

This bar had nearly the length of a city block with all its curves and turns. Back of it white lights shone on mirrors, pyramids of glasses and rows of queer-shaped bottles labeled with vivid colors, and these stood on a back bar draped with the snowiest cloths. The diamond-like dazzle of white half-blinded me. Bright light was also reflected from the varnished columns and beams about the mirrors, from the brass of the bar rails and the nickel of the spigot handles. The bartenders, at least fifteen in number, were all in white jackets. They were shaved in such a clean style, their hair was slicked down into such fancy curls over their eyes, and their mustaches were spiked so elegantly that I was certain dukes couldn't look handsomer. I had never seen such magnificent men before, not even in the saloons of Boise, Idaho. Shiny brass spittoons that looked pretty enough for flower vases stood all along the big footrail. Linen towels were hanging in front of the bar. Glasses clinked; gold and silver jingled; the click of poker chips sounded from the card tables; beer purred as it gushed from the spigot to the glass; laughs and happy talk sounded all along the bar. . . . I sipped my beer delicately and looked through half-closed eyes upon the scene and dreamed. . . .

I remembered a February night in a sandhouse at The Dalles. Hoboes huddled miserably about a fire. Too bitterly cold for sleep. Complaints, denunciations, life defiled and cursed. There we were, used in the working seasons to dig the ditches, build the railroads, harvest the crops; and when winter closed up seasonal work we were made outcasts, jailed, or harried from town to town like criminals. Well, the working stiffs of the Northwest were learning something. In that sandhouse our miserable gang was told of Direct Action and the Red Card. I signed up with the others. We could pay our dues when we got a job.

Then the talk had changed. A dream emerged. It was in such circumstances that American folklore, the art of the plain man, flourished. The eternal force behind all creations of art, noble and lowly, is the desire to escape from reality. And there in the sandhouse I heard again the story of the Hoboes' Heaven. I had heard it before, but Singer Larkin told it with genuine intensity of feeling. Briefly, his tale was about a Heaven in which every house was a saloon, every road a race track, and the only jobs playing poker and crapshooting. Liquor and warmth and play! The saloon was the nearest thing to beauty and comfort that the Western workingman knew in those days. Small wonder that he idealized it in his bitterest hours, that he turned to it when the cold politics of industrial revolt failed to inspire him with hope.

The tale had struck my imagination. And here in Ericsen's it seemed to be realized. Standing at that glittering bar, it was easy for me to fancy that long, hard hours of labor for small wages were gone, that I was done with lousy blankets and sour beans and bully boss-men, that at last I was in a land where every place was like Ericsen's . . . liquor and warmth and play . . . Hoboes' Heaven . . . I had never known a happier hour. . . .

Before the summer was over I was to reach a clearer understanding of the reason for Ericsen's, and for Fritz's, Blazier's, Our House, Billy the Mug's, the Horseshoe, and other famous skidroad saloons of the Pacific Northwest's lumber centers. They were, in fact, the only refuge of the "timber beast," the only places where he was welcomed as a man, where he could find solace and comfort after a hard and mean existence in the woods. In that summer I lost much of my own youth and forgot about fairy tales. It was to be many years before I recovered my boyish perception of the fact that the fanciful tales of Western workingmen were as truly art creations out of their own life as are the formal works of educated storytellers.

The saloon, a famous political leader informs us, is a defunct institution. No one dares to defend it. The place of the saloon in the social life of the time in which it flourished has, however, never been intelligently studied. It is isolated from the life of its time, attacked alone, and never considered in its relations to the greater evils of its day. For example, the timber beast. The timber beast was the great evil of the Northwest twenty years ago; and he will always remain a black blot on the history of that time and on the record of the society which was responsible for him.

As I discovered, soon after shipping from Portland to a Columbia River logging camp, the man who joined the tribe of loggers made himself a pariah among the nice folk of the farms and towns. To these gentry—all of whom were in some way dependent on the lumber industry and consequently on the labor of the men of the woods—the man who appeared with a blanket roll on his back, stagged overalls on his legs, and calked boots on his feet, was simply a strayed animal. He was permitted to stay in town only until his wool was clipped. Then he was herded back to the corral. "Timber beast" he was called, and so he was treated. In those days few loggers attempted to dress up when they came to town, and they never thought of seeking acquaintance among decent girls. Ah, no! Loggers must keep below the Deadline in Seattle and to the North End in Portland. There saloons and red lights were provided and also sundry gambling games, so that there was no chance of a timber beast returning to camp unplucked. The virtuous police protected the good citizens. The skid-road cops had an uncanny instinct for discovering when a logger's last dime was gone. Then and only then was the timber beast herded back to camp.

If the saloon was an evil the logging camp of its time was incomparably more so. The men of the woods were herded into dirty, lousy and unventilated bunkhouses. They were forced to carry their own blankets. There were no facilities for bathing. There were no dry rooms, and after ten or twelve hours of labor in the rain every bunkhouse was pungent with the fumes of drying wool. Grub was plentiful, but it was coarse and badly cooked; the boss of the cookhouse in those days was invariably referred to as "the belly-burglar." On the job ground-lead logging was still the rule, and every camp had a high monthly toll of injury and death. Industrial hospitalization was hardly thought of; any seriously injured man was certain to get the "black bottle" in a county hospital or in the hellholes conducted by medical murderers who fattened on "hospital fees" collected from lumber companies. Workmen's compensation laws were then in the class of "radical and fantastic legislation." Two dollars per ten hours was the common labor wage, and half of that went for board. In short, every condition of existence in the logging camp of that era was brutalizing and degrading, and the man who could stand it perhaps earned the name of "timber beast."

Yet out of such conditions came the Paul Bunyan stories and many other tales that survive because of the beauty of the fancies woven into them by forgotten bards. No doubt it was the misery of life which made imaginative loggers create the stories of Paul Bunyan's camp, with its incomparable cookhouse, delightful bunkhouse life, and interesting labors. Certainly it is true that the bunkhouse bard passed with the timber beast and the miserable conditions of existence in the logging camps.

At any rate, my own experiences in my first year of logging survive in my mind as two tremendous contrasts. One is black with the misery and grief of life and labor in the logging camp of that time; the other shines and rings with the glamor of the moments of escape, when I foregathered with the despised timber beasts in saloons like Ericsen's and escaped reality. There we became heroes. There, over the glasses and under the lights, our labors seemed Herculean, and we boasted that none but bullies like ourselves could stand them. In Ericsen's we swaggered to the bar and bawled our defiance. Timber beasts, and proud of it! We repeated tales about mighty men of the woods to justify our kind. We sang old ballads. We were outcasts, but we had a tribal life. In Ericsen's was glory, and there we found pride. . . . The aftermath, of course, was a sick and bitter awakening in a foul-smelling bunkhouse, to be high-balled to work by an iron-fisted bull of the woods . . . but a little of the glamor always remained, to make us feel some hope in our existence. There was always a blow-in ahead. . . .

The timber beasts, the saloon, and all of the old life that belonged to them passed in the war. Many different groups claim the credit for making the logger's trade a respectable and profitable one. The I. W. W., once the most vociferous and violent of Western labor organizations, claims the credit for sheets and showers in the camps and for the eight-hour day. The lumbermen insist that they themselves inaugurated the social and economic changes. Politicians horn in and shout for recognition. The fact is, however, that no organization or individual was more than an agent for the inevitable change. The real cause was the sweep of the tide of Eastern urban civilization over the West.

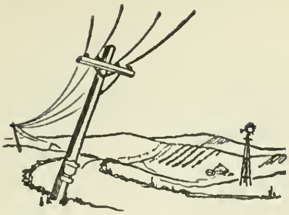
Transportation and finance had at last bound the West to the East. Small lumbering and logging operations were being bought up by the big companies. The manufacture and marketing of lumber were reorganized along Eastern industrial lines. Vast mechanical developments occurred in both the mills and the woods. The degree of Logging Engineer was conferred on graduates of forestry schools. The bull of the woods who ruled by brawn gave way to the logging superintendent who was technically skilled. Logging railroads, new types of bull donkeys, high lead and skyline logging methods brought mechanics to the woods. The logger became a skilled laborer, and as such he demanded the wages and living conditions enjoyed by skilled laborers in the cities. All of the changes were coming into effect when America entered the war. The economic condition of the logger had improved tremendously, but he was still a timber beast in the eyes of the farm and town folks. War conditions, however, elevated his social status and made his trade respected, even admired.

This resulted from the entry of the government into spruce production. Col. Bruce Disque was sent out from Washington to organize the lumber industry for wartime needs. The Spruce Division was formed, the government eight-hour day established in the logging camps. Loggers became soldiers, and soldiers were popular. When the erstwhile timber beast came to town he no longer wore the old regalia of stagged pants and calked boots; instead, he was shiny and neat in a tailored uniform. He was no longer kept to the North End and below the Dead Line. Now he was one of Uncle Sam's boys, a fit companion for decent girls, a man honored by all. He learned the pleasures of the theater, the automobile, and the dance palace. He discovered that with this broadening of his social life the necessity for the saloon was diminished and his appetite for its beverages fell away. He was no longer a timber beast; at last he was a man.

And he was more of a man in the woods. Production per man far exceeded the figures of the old era. The lumbermen learned that better food, cleaner living conditions, shorter hours, respectable treatment meant more logs and lumber. After the war, some of the old-time lumbermen fought for a return to the old conditions, but the younger and more progressive men among them held to the once revolutionary idea that it was better in every sense to regard workers in the woods as men rather than as beasts.

So the logger of today is a man with a highly respectable and profitable trade; he is no longer a drudging and despised timber beast but a skilled mechanic of the timber. His bunkhouse is orderly, clean, and comfortable. He sits at a table loaded with savory, well-prepared food. There is a camp garage for his automobile. He enjoys the radio and the phonograph. He is protected by company insurance, workmen's compensation laws, and first-class hospital service. When he drives to town he goes to his tailor's, where his hundred-dollar suit has been kept for him, dresses up in an elegant style, and stops at one of the best hotels. He has friends among smart and pretty business girls. His only concern with liquor is to be socially acceptable; that is, he must never be without a full pocket flask.

Certainly for this logger the saloon is a defunct institution, but only because other institutions that once made his life wretched and bitter are also defunct. The romance of his life is also gone, for that romance was made by the contrasts in his life, the high vivid spots among the darkest of shadows. He no longer suffers miserably in a life of bleak toil, and he no longer riots in a tumultuous blow-in, or dreams purple fancies of a logger's heaven ruled by a beneficent god such as the great and good Paul Bunyan. He is no longer the outcast, the timber beast; he is the everyday skilled American workman, prosperous and proud. Romance passed with his old life. I for one often look back with regret on "the good old days," but I know that is because I forget the long months of labor in the woods, and only remember vividly the few nights in Ericsen's. So I cheer the passing of the timber beast and salute the timber mechanic, that fat and sassy plutocrat of the modern logging camp.



The People's Choice

Erskine Caldwell

GUS was leaning against the fount in the drugstore Saturday morning when Ed Wright, one of the elders, came in and told Gus that the church had made him a deacon. Laying aside the election itself, that was the first of the blunders that were made between then and noon Sunday; Ed should have had sense enough not to notify Gus until about midnight Saturday, or better still, just before preaching-time Sunday morning. All the blame for what took place cannot be put on Ed, though; Gus should be held just as responsible for what happened as anyone else in town, even if he did get drunker than usual.

After Ed had told Gus about the church election, Gus just stood there looking at Ed and at the boy behind the fount for several minutes. He was feeling so good about it he didn't know what to say. He was as pleased about it as he ever was when he heard the county election returns.

"You're a deacon now, Gus," Ed said, leaning against the fount and waiting for Gus to set him up. "Don't let the boys in the back seats slip any suspender buttons over on you."

"You know," Gus said, "I'd rather be elected deacon in the church than to get any office in the county—except tax assessor. By George, it's a big thing to be a deacon."

Gus was the county tax assessor. He had held the office against all opposition for the past ten or fifteen years, and from the way things looked then, he would continue being the assessor as long as men went to the polls and cast their ballots.

"Well," Ed said, "everybody's glad about it, Gus. There wasn't any doubt about you being elected after your name was put up. It was unanimous, too."

Gus was feeling so good he didn't know what to say. He waited for Ed to tell him more about the election, when the preacher and all the elders voted for him; but Ed was licking the corners of his mouth for a drink.

"Let's have a drink, Gus," he suggested.

"Oh, sure, sure!" Gus said, waking up. "What'll you have, Ed?"

"Make mine a lime-coke," he told the boy behind the fount.

"Give me another coke," Gus said, "with three squirts of ammonia."

That was the fifth coke-and-ammonia Gus had drunk since eight-thirty that morning.

He and Ed stood at the fount drinking their Coca-Colas silently. Gus was busy thinking about his election as a deacon, and he was too busy thinking about it to say anything. After a while, Ed said that he had to hurry back to the hardware store to see if any customers had come in, and he left Gus leaning against the fount drinking his coke-and-ammonia.

"You'll have to help take up the collection tomorrow morning, Gus," Ed said at the door. "You better wear some shoes that don't squeak so much, because everybody will be looking at you."

"Oh, sure, sure," Gus said. "I'll be there, all right. I'm a deacon now."

Gus was so busy thinking about his being a deacon in the church that he hardly knew what he was saying, or what Ed had said. He was busy thinking about celebrating in some way, too. He had never won an election yet that he hadn't celebrated, and he was just as proud of being a deacon as he was of being county assessor. He walked out of the drugstore and started for the barbershop.

In the back room of the barbershop there was a little closet where he kept his corn and gin. He intended making the celebration this time as big as, or bigger than, any he had ever undertaken before. Usually, he only had the chance to celebrate every few years, when he was re-elected county tax assessor, and this was an extra time, like an unexpected holiday.

Gus Streetman was as big-hearted as a man can be, and people could not help liking him. You could walk up to Gus on the street on a Saturday afternoon and ask Gus for anything you wanted, and Gus would give it to you. You could ask Gus to lend you his automobile to take a ride out to the country in, and Gus would slap his hand on your shoulder, just as if you were doing him a big favor, and say: "Oh, sure, sure! Go ahead, Joe. Why, by George, all I've got in the world is yours for the asking. Sure, go ahead and drive it all you want to, Joe."

After you had thanked Gus for the use of his car, he would silence you and say: "Now don't start talking like that, Joe. You make me feel like I ain't doing enough for you. Drive down to the filling station and fill her up with gas, and charge it to me. Just tell Dick I said to make out a ticket for whatever you want, and I'll come by and take it up the first of the week."

That's how Gus was about everything. It never mattered to him what a man wanted. If you wanted something, all you had to do was to ask Gus, and if he had it, or could lay his hands on it, it was yours until you got good and ready to hand it back to him.

That was why Gus got elected county tax assessor time after time. He had been tax assessor for about fifteen years already, and no man who had ever tried to run against Gus in the primaries had a dog's chance of taking the office away from him. Just before a primary, Gus would load his automobile up with three or four dozen of those big Senator Watson watermelons, and start out electioneering. He would come to a house beside the road, and get out carrying two of those big Senator Watson melons under his arms. When he reached the front porch, he would roll the melons up to the door and take out his pearl-handled pocketknife and rap on the boards until somebody came out.

"Well, how's everything, Harry?" Gus would say, thumping the Senator Watsons with his knuckles, and cocking his head sideways to hear the *thump! thump!* "How are you satisfied with your tax assessment?"

Nobody was ever satisfied, of course, and that was all there would be to Gus getting another vote for the primary. Being a Democrat, he never had to worry about the Republicans at election time. The lily-whites never bothered with county politics; the mail carriers knew perfectly well which side their bread was buttered on.

"Reckon we can get the assessment changed, Gus?" the man would say.

Gus would never answer that question, because by that time he was always busy splitting open one of the big Senator Watsons. When he had got the heart cut out, and had passed it around, he would wipe the blade of his pearl-handled knife on his pants-leg and shake hands all around.

"We need a little rain, don't we?" Gus would say, starting back to the road where his car was. "Maybe we'll get a shower before sundown."

That's how Gus got elected county tax assessor the first time, and that's how he was re-elected every four years following. He never made any promises; therefore he never violated any. But he got the votes, nearly all there were in the whole county.

When Gus had started out to be elected deacon, he went about it the same way he did when running for political office. He filled the preacher up on those big Senator Watsons, and all the elders, too. When the church election was held during the last week in July, Gus's name was the first one put up for deacon, and there was only one ballot taken. Gus got all the votes. But when Gus wasn't canvassing for votes, political or otherwise, and when he wasn't out in some part of the county assessing property, he was drinking corn and gin. He kept a store of it in the back room of the barbershop, another supply in the garage at home where his wife couldn't find it, and a third one at the courthouse where he could reach it at any time of the day or night.

Gus never got too drunk to walk; that is to say, Fred Jones, the marshal, had never had to lock him up. Gus was always on his feet, no matter how much he had been drinking, or for how long a time. He could hold his corn and gin with never an outward sign of drunkenness, unless you happened to look at his eyes, or to measure his stride.

That Saturday morning, though, after Ed Wright had notified him of the election, Gus went down to the barbershop and cleaned out all his liquor there, and then he walked over to the courthouse and started on the bottles he kept in the coalbox in his office on the second floor.

Nobody saw much of him again that day, until at a little after eight o'clock that night when he came out of the courthouse and walked across the square for another coke-and-ammonia at the fount in the drugstore. Even then nobody paid much attention to Gus, because he was walking in fairly even strides, and he wasn't talking unduly loud for Saturday night. The marshal watched him for a few minutes, and then went back to the street in front of the Negro fish restaurants to pick up a few more drunks for the lockup.

There had been a traveling carnival in town all that week, and nearly everybody went to the show grounds that night to see it close up and move off to the next place. Gus started out there with two or three other men about ten-thirty or eleven. All of them were pretty well liquored-up, and Gus was shining. When they got to the carnival grounds, Gus started out to wind up his celebration. He let loose that Saturday night. He took in all the side shows, and he had a big crowd following him around the grounds, whooping it up with him.

Just before midnight, when the carnival was getting ready to close and move on to the next town, Gus saw a show he had missed. It was a little tent off to itself, with a big red-painted picture of a woman pretty much naked dancing on it. There was no name on the show, as there was on the others, but down in one corner of the big red picture, just under the girl's feet, there was a little sign that said: *For Men Only.*

As soon as somebody told Gus it was a hoochie-coochie show, he made for it, pushing people right and left out of his way. He walked up to the ticket-seller, bought three or four dozen tickets, and waved his arms at everybody who wanted to go in with him and see the show. After they had got inside, the show went all to pieces so quickly no one knew what had happened.

Nobody yet tells exactly what Gus said or did when he got inside with the hoochie-coochie girl, but the show was a wreck inside of five minutes. It might have been Gus who jerked out the center pole, bringing the tent down on top of everybody, and it might not have been Gus who grabbed the girl and made her yell as though she were being squeezed to death. But anyway, the tent came down, the dancer yelled and screamed, the ticket-seller shouted for help, and some fool down under the tent struck a match to the canvas. When the crowd got the blazing tent off the girl and the bunch of men, they found her and Gus down on the bottom of the pile. Fred Jones, the marshal, came running up all excited, deputizing citizens right and left, and got everybody herded out of the show grounds and closed up the carnival.

What happened to Gus after that, nobody knows exactly, because some of his friends pried him loose from the little yellow-skinned hoochie-coochie dancer, and carried him back to town and locked the barbershop door so he couldn't get out where the marshal was sure to get him if he showed himself on the street again.

Gus didn't go home to his wife that night, because he was in the back room of the barbershop pulling on two or three new bottles at three o'clock when the rest of the bunch decided it was time to call it a night and to go home and get some sleep. They locked Gus up in the back room to sleep it off.

Early the next morning Clyde Young, the barber, went down and shaved Gus and patched his clothes up a little; and at about eleven-thirty, ten or fifteen minutes before the preaching at the church was due to end, Gus walked into the church and sat down in a rear pew.

Gus was supposed to be there, all right, because he was a deacon then, and it was his duty to help take up the morning offering. But Gus was not supposed to be there in the shape he was in, all liquored-up again fresh that morning in the barbershop. Clyde Young had brought Gus an eye-opener when he went down to shave him and to get him ready to take up collection at the church.

Nobody paid much attention to Gus when he walked into the church and took a seat near the back. The preacher saw him, and likewise a dozen or more of the congregation who turned around to see who was coming to church so late. But nobody knew the condition Gus was in. He did not show it anymore than he ever did. He looked to be as sober as the preacher himself.

Gus sat still and quiet in the back of the church until the sermon was over. It was then time to take up the morning offering. It was customary for the deacons to walk down to the front of the pulpit, pick up the collection baskets, take up the money, and then to march back down the aisles while one of the women in the choir sang a solo.

Gus went down and got his basket, all right, and took up all the money on his side of the aisle without missing a dime. Then when all the deacons had got to the rear of the church, they began marching in step, slowly, down the aisle towards the pulpit where the preacher was waiting to say a prayer over the money and to pronounce the benediction. The girl singing the solo was supposed to time herself so she would get to the end of the piece just as the deacons laid the collection baskets on the table in front of the pulpit.

Everything worked smoothly enough, until just about the time that the rest of the deacons got about halfway down the aisle on their way to the pulpit. The soloist was standing up in the choir singing her piece, the organist was playing the accompaniment, when Gus stopped dead in his tracks, playing havoc with all the ritual.

The elders and the preacher should have had better sense than to make Gus a deacon, to begin with; but he had carried them off their feet, just as he did the voters when he was canvassing for re-election for county tax assessor. It wasn't Gus's fault any more than it was the fault of the people who elected him a deacon; they were the ones upon whom most of the blame should be put. And on the other hand, even if he was to be a deacon, somebody connected with the church should have hunted Gus up that morning before preaching started and made sure that he was in condition to enter a house of worship. But things were never done that way. People liked Gus, and they let him do as he pleased.

When Gus came stomping down the aisle that morning, rattling the collection basket as though he were warming up a crap game, he was as drunk as a horse-trader on court day. But it was the people's fault; they should never have made Gus a deacon to begin with.

Gus was standing there in the aisle by himself. The other deacons had marched down to the table in front of the pulpit, glancing back over their shoulders to see what the matter was with Gus, but scared to go back and get him. They didn't know what he might say or do if they tried to make him follow them.

By that time the church was rank with the smell of Gus's liquor, and all the people were sniffing the air, and turning around in their pews to look at him. Gus was staring at the girl singing the solo in the choir, and shaking the dimes and quarters in the collection basket as if it had been a kitty-pot in a Saturday night crap game at the barbershop.

Then, suddenly, Gus shouted. He must have been heard all the way across town in the Baptist church, disrupting their service, too.

"Shake it up!" Gus yelled at the girl singing the solo.

The church was buzzing like a beehive in no time. The congregation was standing up, sniffing Gus's whisky-smell; the organist stopped playing the accompaniment for the solo, the girl stopped singing, and everybody, including the preacher, was staring openmouthed at Gus Streetman. All that time, Gus was standing there in the aisle rattling the money and looking at the soloist.

When everybody was thinking that the worst was over, Gus shouted again.

"Shake it up!" he yelled at the girl. "Shake it up, Baby!"

Nearly everybody in the church knew what Gus was talking about, because most of the men had been to the carnival, and either had seen or had been told about the little brown-skinned hoochie-coochie dancer in the tent for men only.

Gus was getting ready to yell again, and maybe do something pretty bad, but before he could do it, a bunch of the elders and deacons jumped on him and hustled him out of the church.

The minister said a hurried and short benediction, and ran out the back door and around to the street to see what was happening to Gus in front of the church.

The elders and deacons hustled Gus into an automobile and drove off with him, at fifty miles an hour. The preacher and the rest of the congregation came running down the street behind the car. When they reached the jail, nearly everybody else in town was down there by that time to see Gus get locked up. The Baptist church had turned out, and all the Baptists were there on their way home to see what was happening. There was a wait of about ten or fifteen minutes while somebody was going for Fred Jones, the marshal; Fred wasn't a member of any church, and he was always at home Sunday morning reading the Sunday papers from Atlanta. The marshal had the only key there was, and Gus couldn't be put inside until he came and unlocked the door.

While everybody was standing around looking and talking, Gus climbed up on the radiator of an automobile and held out his hands for silence. People standing off at a distance pushed up closer, saying, "Shhh!" in order to hear what Gus was about to say.

"Citizens of Washington County," Gus shouted, waving his hands and looking the crowd over just as he did when he took the stump for the county elections, "I'm not asking you this time if you are satisfied with your tax assessments; I'm not here today to ask if you believe there is a better man in the county than Gus Streetman. Citizens of Washington County, I'm here today to ask you if there's another man in the entire county who can increase the membership and attendance and double the collection in a church like the man you are now facing!"

The marshal came running up just then and opened up the lockup. He walked over to the car and jerked Gus down from the radiator and hustled him inside the building. The crowd pressed around the little red-brick lockup, trying to see what Gus looked like on the inside. A lot of the ones who were not engaged in pushing and shoving and elbowing towards the windows, were shouting: "Hooray for Gus! Hooray for Gus! Hooray for Gus Streetman!"

While the crowd was milling around the windows of the lockup Gus's face suddenly appeared at one of them. He shouted for attention and raised his hands for silence as if he were canvassing the county for tax assessor again.

"Go home and think it over, folks!" he yelled. "And when election day comes around, bring the family out and let's pile up a landslide for Gus Streetman!"

Somebody in the crowd shouted: "Hooray for Gus!"

Gus held up his hands again, silencing the crowd.

"Vote for Gus Streetman!" he yelled. "Everybody votes for Gus Streetman! Gus Streetman for deacon!"

Just then the marshal came up behind Gus and hustled him away from the window and pushed him into one of the lockup cages. After that there was nothing to stay for any longer, because Gus was locked out of sight, and the crowd turned away and started home for Sunday dinner. Everybody was hoping, though, that Gus would get bailed out of the lockup in time to take up the collection again the following week, the second Sunday in August.

FOR AN APPLE GROWER

Paul Angle

Being an old man and his mind bearded
By the white memory of many years,
I listened to his voice. He talked the way
A horse drinks, with a slow deliberation,
The gulp of words big in his throat like water:

We meet it all the time with the animals.
You know how cattle lie for hours on a hill
As if the wind had roped and thrown them down,
Head hanging quiet while the hollow eyes
Stare at nothing or eternity,
Moving only the resolute, old cud.
They die that way. When the milk fever took
That grey-faced Guernsey, ill with her first calf,
I'd go into her stall last thing at night
And she'd be looking at the very corner

I'd found her watching first thing in the morning,
Her eyes full of a wild emptiness,
Waiting for something that I could not see.
So with a woman, there's that in her eyes,
When the next breath's a chance and each tomorrow
Is not just one more day but another life,
That sees beyond your hand on her damp forehead,
Through the house wall, beyond the very air.
It can't stop looking more than the heart can beating.
It's a willow rod that bends to hidden water.
There's a natural power that pulls the unwilling head
Whether of woman or of animal
To face its own mad face and without pity.
It's like a drouth July, the thirsty sun
Drinking the desperate hot eyes of hawks.

I watched his grave tongue grip a thought and plow it
Grimly through the reluctant loam of speech,
Turning the heavy furrow of his talking.
One brawny shoulder backed up what he said,
Leaning along the line of words. His face
Lay open to the world as rock to light.
There was a moving calmness in the man,
No beating motion like a nervous bird,
But a plowed field's deep and inner energy
That with no drift or act but the dark rain's
Will drive the pale wheat up. He looked at me
With eyes steady as breathing:
                                        You know, a boy
Will live for years with an imagined child
Who has a name and will but no touched hand.
So with pain, it is another person
Who bears you bitter company along
A burning mile of road on the mind's bent hill,
Or in a savage friendship paces off
The little, brutal length of every bone.

And if he closed them once or turned away
I seemed to live only in those grey eyes
He waited till I looked again straight at him.

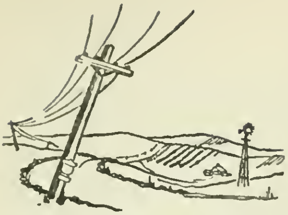
I'd vanish with their sight:
You met her once,
But late, when pain was native to her nature—
Drank it in water, heard it in hello.
She called you by your name and shook your hand.
That was an act of courage and of will
Greater than a tough man's on a terrible mountain
Climbing the massive wall of ice and wind.
Each breath gave her double nourishment—
To the declining heart, the labored living,
To the growing death, the energy of ending.

He stopped while the cattle with their clicking hooves
Bold on the shy and beaten dust entered
The barn where calves bawled for the lost udder.
He raised his eyes beyond the hills with a glance
Of tall corn lifting straightly to the sun:
When it's that way even the blood's beating
Is a dark and needful thing to be endured,
A thunder breaking behind the tautened ear.
No strange power enters from outside, we live
Intimate with dying, year after year
Our death grows in us like a toughened bone.

He held one breath a long time, then went on:
No, don't bother to be kind and say
I can go back and see her broad thumbprint
Worn in the worked earth. I can't learn the crippled
Lesson of comfort. At my age
You gather patience like a mold, aware
Wisdom is knowing when you can't be wise.
I'll never walk through doors that she has opened,
Or scoop up water on the hottest day
From a clear spring where she has knelt to drink.
And yet our days are here to be lived out,
The plain bread to be eaten. Any man
Can put his hands to his own way of work
And do it with an animal, old wit.
Yes, I'll go back. The apple trees won't fail me.
I'll set my face with theirs against the sun.

The drunken bees will drink the bruised windfalls.
We'll put the crop away in bin and cellar
Where it can glow for a red autumn moon
Caught underground to cheer us through the winter.
I hope where she is there are apple trees
That must be pruned, and sprayed against the worms.
It makes you glad you have a nose, to breathe
The autumn smell of apples in the spring.

He rose, planting his feet down firm and easy
The way a man does walking the plowed earth,
Ready for a stone's roll or a clod's breaking:
Well, I'll go back and watch the season's way.
There are certain fields that wait my personal
Watching before they let the arbutus bloom.
And there's a friendly road up in Vermont
That winds and wanders in the folded hills
As if it had been laid out by a man
Who roamed all through an ancient, rainy April
Looking for the yellow moccasin,
From left to right, wherever he saw a flower,
Making progress and a kind of path
Only with luck and the plant's way of growing.
There I can walk and herd my yesterdays
Like slow, fat sheep, their eyes reddened with dust,
To a blind market in some crossroads town.
Neither sheep nor I can know, until we're there,
Beyond how many hills and turns it lies.
The footing will be smooth in the tramped dirt,
With the sun to mark the stages of our going.
There will be time to see a friend or two,
And waiting by the well for a cool drink
Talk the day's news, the weather's wilfulness.
There will be time to understand again,
As I walk the dry, deliberate miles away,
It is heaven and hell we have now in our days,
Earth and the simple living are to come.



Sandhill Sundays

Mari Sandoz

OUT of the East and the South, God's country, came the movers, pounding their crowbait ponies or their logy plow critters on to the open range of Northwest Nebraska. They exchanged green grass, trees, and summer night rains for dun-colored sandhills crowding upon each other far into the horizon, wind singing in the red bunch grass or howling over the snow-whipped knobs of December, and the heat devils of July dancing over the hard land west of the hills. No Indian wars, few gun fights with bad men or wild animals—mostly it was just standing off the cold and scratching for grub. And lonesome! Dog owls, a few nesters in dugouts or soddies, dusty cow waddies loping over the hills, and time dragging at the heels—every day Monday.

Then came big doings. Cow towns with tent and false-front saloons; draw played Sunday afternoons in the dust of the trail between the shacks; cowboys tearing past the little sod churches, shooting the air full of holes while the sky pilots inside prayed hell and damnation on them; settlers cleaned of their shirts by cardsharpers whilst their women picked cow chips barefooted, and corn leaves rattled dry in the wind.

When the settlers got clear down in the mouth, the sky pilots showed up among them. The meeting-point of the revivals was most generally Alkali Lake, on the Flats. All Sunday morning moving wagons, horsebackers, hoofers, and a buggy or two from town collected along the bare bank. Almost every dugout or claim shack for twenty, thirty miles around was deserted. Everybody turned out to hear the walking parson.

From the back end of a buggy, fortified by a beard cut like that of Christ in holy pictures, the sky pilot lined out the crowd hunched over on wagon tongues, stretched on horse blankets or on the ground, hot with the glaring sun.

"You see them heat waves out there on the prairie? Them's the fires of hell, licking round your feet, burning your feet, burning your faces red as raw meat, drying up your crops, drawing the water out of your wells! You see them thunderheads, shining like mansions in the sky but spurting fire and shaking the ground under your feet? God is mad, mad as hell!"

Somewhere a woman began to moan and cry. The crowd was up like a herd of longhorns at the smell of fire. A swarthy ground-scratcher from down on the Breaks began to sing "Nearer My God to Thee," couldn't remember the words, and broke out crying, too. Others took up songs. "Beulah Land." Somebody broke into the popular parody and hid his face. "Washed in the Blood of the Lamb."

Two whiskered grangers helped the parson off the buggy. "Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus!" he sang as he waded into the already cooling water of the lake. The moaning woman was ducked first and came up sputtering and coughing. The crowd pushed forward, to the bank, into the water.

And when the sun slipped away and the cool wind carried the smell of stale water weed over the prairie, almost everybody was saved. Mrs. Schmidt, with eight children and a husband usually laid out in the saloon at Hay Springs, sang all the way home she was so happy. The next week they sent her to the insane asylum. The youngest Frahm girl took pneumonia from the ten-mile trip behind plow critters and died. The lone Bohemian who scratched the thin ground on the Breaks strung himself up.

Talk of the big revival drifted back into the hills. "I wisht I coulda gone; it'd-a been a lot of comfort to me," Mrs. Endow mumbled when she heard about it. But one of their horses had died of botts and her only chance of getting out now was in a pine box.

II

The nesters, well versed in drainage, were helpless against the drouth. Each spring there was less money for seed, and Sundays were more and more taken up with the one problem, irrigation. Everybody threw in together here, the Iowa farmer, the New England schoolteacher afraid of his horses, and the worn-out desert rat, the

European intellectual, and the Southern poor white. There was no place for women at these meetings and so they stayed at home, wrangling the old hen and chickens and watering the dry sticks of hollyhock.

Ten years later the drouth, the cold, and too much buying on pump had driven out the shallow-rooted nesters and the sky pilots. A few hilltop churches took care of those who still believed in a benevolent God. The stickers took up dry farming, pailed cows, and ran cattle. But farming and milking meant long hours; ranching called for large pastures and consequent isolation. Night entertainment grew more common. First came literaries, with windy debates on Popular Election of Our Presidents and the British Colonial Policy, followed by spelldowns and a program—songs: "Love Is Such a Funny, Funny Thing," "Oh, Bury Me Not on the Lone Prairie;" dialogues; pieces: "The Deacon's Courtship" and "The Face on the Barroom Floor"; food. Then the long trails across the hills, dangerous at night, particularly along the gullies and river bluffs.

Eventually most of the communities settled upon dancing as the most conducive to all-night entertainment. Everybody went. If Old John was running the floor at the dance, there'd be a shapping match if he had to cuss out every cowhand or bean-eater there. He'd begin to look the crowd over while he was calling the square dances:

"Gents bow out and ladies bow under,
Hug 'em up tight and swing like thunder."

—up on an old tub or bench, stomping his boots to hurry the fiddlers until the girls' feet left the floor and skirts flew. At midnight he'd help carry in the wash boiler full of coffee, dip a tin cup among the floating sacks of grounds, and pour it back through the steam.

"Looks like your coffee fell in a crick coming over," he always bawled out.

Nobody except Mrs. Beal, Old Man Beal's mail-order wife, ever minded. With his cud of Battle Ax stowed away in a little rawhide sack he carried, Old John would sink his freed jaws into a thick slab of boiled ham and bread as he helped pass the dishpans full of sandwiches and cake to couples lining the walls, sitting on boards laid between chairs. The remains in the pans he'd distribute among the stags sitting on horse blankets, like flies gathered about drops of sorghum on the floor. And afterward, while he swept the dust and bread rinds into little piles, he'd egg on the shapping match.

"Times ain't like they was," he'd complain, looking the crowd over. "There ain't a feller here with spunk 'nuff to take a leatherin' to git a purty girl."

Somebody who didn't bring a girl but would like to take one home finally grinned and stood up, his neck getting red when the prettier girls, those that might be chosen, giggled. And somebody who was afraid of losing his girl, or had a general prod on, got up too, and the bargain was made.

A horsebacker's leather shaps are brought in and unlaced so the two legs fall apart. Each shapper takes half and the crowd follows them to the middle of the floor, Old John passing out advice impartially between trips to the door to spit.

Coats, if any, are jerked off, collars unbuttoned. Norm and Al, the two shappers, sit on the floor, facing, their legs dove-tailed, each with half a shap. Everybody crowds up, the dancers first, then the older folks, and around the edge the boys and dogs.

They draw straws from Old John's fist and the unlucky one, Norm, lies on his back and snaps his legs up over him. He takes the horsehide across his rump with all the sting Al can spread on it. Al's legs are up now; Norm gets his lick in on saddle-hardened muscles. The crowd yells. The *whack-whack* of the shaps settles down into a steady clockwork business, the legs going up and down like windmill rods. After a while Al jerks his head and Old John drags him out. He sits up, his face red and streaked as a homesick school-ma'am's, only his is sweating.

"Norm's got two pairs of pants on."

The accused is taken out and fetched back. "Only one pair," says Old John. The whacking starts again. Girls giggle nervously, their men hanging to them. The crowd is taking sides. Two sprouts near the edge take a lam at each other. Old John separates them. On the floor the whacking is slowing up. He drags Al away again, the puncher's head lolling, his face gray as window putty.

The crowd shies back. A pail of water is brought in. Al's face is wet down with a towel. He grunts and turns over on his belly, the sign that Norm's won. Who'll he pick? There's no hurry. He can't dance any more tonight and it's a long time until "Home, Sweet Home." Everybody is talking. The fiddlers start:

"Honor your partner and don't be afraid
To swing corner lady in a waltz promenade."

Sunday was spent in getting home and sleeping.

III

As the nesters pulled out, sheepmen bought in along the fringe of the hills. Here and there a settler who couldn't make a go of the newer farming or cattle took up woolie culture too, and then the coyote, up to now a raider of hen coops and scrub calves, developed into a killer. Wolf hunts were organized. The regular hour for a hunt was about nine in the morning. A relay of shots started the horsebackers off on a fifteen-mile front, from Mirage Flats to Keplinger's Bridge. Yelling, whistling, running any coyote that tried to break the line, they headed for Jackson's, towards a big V, made of hog wire, chicken fencing, and lath corncribbing, with a wire trap in the point.

Broad-handed women unpacked baskets of grub in the big barn now for the dinner.

"Time they was rounding up a few coyotes," Mrs. Putney says, as she uncovers a roaster full of browned chickens. "Henry lost twenty-five sheep last week, just killed and let lay."

"They been having three, four hunts a year since '84 and all they does is make the critters harder to catch. They nearly never gets none," Mary Bowen, an old settler, commented as she measured out the ground coffee. "Dogs or poison, that fixes the sneaking devils that gets my turkeys."

"But where's the fun in that?" asks one of the girls climbing into the mow, late, but not dressed for work anyway.

By one o'clock black specks are running over the Flats like bugs. Yells, commands, a cloud of dust. Horses tromping on each other's heels. A few shots. That's all.

Four rabbits, one badger, and two coyotes, for two hundred hunters.

"Got sight of a couple more, but they musta snuck outa the lines. Not many-a the Pine Creek bunch showed up."

Now the dinner, dished up on long boards over barrels in the mow. Windy fellows talking about long-ago hunts, when there were real wolves, too smart for a mob. Cigars were passed by the local candidate for the legislature; an invitation to a hunt at Rushville two weeks come Sunday was read, and the hunt was over.

IV

But the grass in the loose soil died under the sharp hoofs and close cropping of the woolies. The ranchers hated sheep, and made it as hot for the woolie nurses as they could. At last most of the sheepmen pulled their freight. But just as the country was going back to cows, the Kinkaid Act was passed. The land rush put a shack on every section of land—Easterners mostly, who established Sunday schools, with ladies' aids to meet Sunday afternoons becauses the horses must work on weekdays. Many of the newcomers objected to dancing and had play-parties instead. The soddies were small and the Kinkaider chose his games accordingly. Charades, guessing games, or

Tin-tin,
Come in,
Want to buy some tin?

Perhaps

Pleased or displeased?
Displeased.
What can I do to please you?

Foot races, pussy wants a corner, drop the handkerchief, or all outs in free on moonlit summer evenings. And endless songs, many of them parodies on popular tunes:

Al Reneau was a ranchman's name,
Skinning Kinkaiders was his game,
First mortgages only, at a high percent,
Jew you down on your cattle to the last red cent.

But no matter how much truck the Kinkaider grew, he couldn't turn it into cash profitably unless it could walk the thirty, forty miles to a shipping point. They must have a railroad. Once more the women stayed at home while the men gathered at the local post office, chewed tobacco, talked, wrote letters, signed petitions, and bought more machinery on pump, on the hope of a railroad that never came. Once more the shallow-rooted left and the rest turned into combination farmers and stockmen. Sundays became ranch days, with a new crop of cowpunchers to show off before the native daughters at scratching matches.

The crowd is perched on the top planks, on the up-wind side of the corral. Here Monkey Ward cowboys strut about in bat wings and loud shirts. Riders that are riders sit on their haunches in the sun, dressed in worn shaps and blue shirts. In the corral several green hands are running a handful of wild-eyed colts around, trying for a black gelding. They snag an old sorrel mare, have to throw her to get the rope, try again.

"Why don't y'u do y'ur practisin' on y'ur bucket calves to home?" an old-timer laughs, nudging his straw-chewing neighbor. Dust, mix-up of horses and booted cowboys. They have the gelding, snub him short. Now for the blind and the leather. Red climbs on the last horse, the drawing card of the Sunday afternoon.

"Let 'er go!"

The corral gate flies back. The blind's jerked away. The black shakes, gathers into a hump, pushing Red up into the sky.

"Rip him open!"

The spurs rowel a red arc on the black hide. The horse goes up, turns, hits the dust headed north, and it's over. Red's still going south.

A hazer snags the horse, not head-shy, and brings him in. The fence hoots when Red gets up, dusts off his new hat, and walks away to himself. Not even hurt.

Lefty is prodded off the fence, not so keen now as he was a minute before Red lit. He climbs on. The black, instead of going up, spraddles out, sinking his smoke belly to the ground.

"Scratch him!" an old-timer shouts. Lefty does. The horse is off, across the prairie, bucking and running in a straight line. That's nothing. But he stops short, all four feet together. Lefty comes near going on.

"Fan him!" a tenderfoot shouts. An old rider spits. His guess is correct. There isn't time for fanning. The black leaves the ground, swaps ends, runs, swaps again. Lefty hangs on as best he can but the turns come too fast. He's down on his shoulder, just missing the double kick the black lets out before he quits the country. Lefty picks himself up, his arm hanging funny.

"Collarbone's busted."

A couple of girls in overalls slide off the fence and fuss over Lefty. Any rider's a good rider while he's hurt.

"That horse belongs in a rodeo string," they comfort him.

The fence is deserted. "See you all at my place tonight!" Madge Miller shouts. The young people scatter down the valley, in little knots and couples. Some shag it over the chop hills, hurrying home to do the chores so they can go to the party at Madge's.

"Next scratching match at the Bar M week come Sunday," someone reminds the riders.

"Hi!"

V

The country is scarcely grown up and people are already building a tradition, a background. Old settlers and their children are suddenly superior to newer settlers and entitled to an annual barbecue as befits the honor. An old-time roundup dust hangs over Peck's Grove. Horses shy and snort at the smell of fire and frying meat. Cars are lined up by the signal stick of Mike Curran, who once prodded cows through the branding chute. Cowboys tear up, leading wild horses for the bucking contest.

"Hi!"

"Hi! Gonna ride that snaky bronc? Betcha two bits you can't even sit my old broomtail!"

Women hurry about, lugging heavy baskets, picking a shady place for the old settler's table. The men look over the race track, the horses, the new cars.

"Well, you son of a sand turtle! Step down and look at your saddle!"

Logan-Pomroy grins and gets out of his imported car. He shakes the hand of Old Amos, champion muskrat trapper, for this one day a year forgetting that he is owner of a ranch and three banks and that Amos is in dirty overalls, with gunny sack and baling wire for shoes. Today they are old cronies, the two oldest settlers.

"How's the meat hole coming?" Logan-Pomroy demands, and leads the way to the barbecue pit. Two sweating ranch cooks are turning quarters of browning beef with pitchforks or basting the meat carefully with a mixture of water, vinegar, salt, and pepper. The drippings sizzle and smoke in the red bed of ash-wood coals in the pit under the barbecuing racks.

"Come and git it!" a fat woman calls after what seems hours.

The men trail over to a table made of salt barrels and planks covered with white cloths. At the head Logan-Pomroy and Amos sit, with later settlers down the sides. Old settlers' daughters wait on them, passing huge platters of beef, mutton, and pork, followed by unlimited vegetables, salads, pies, cake, fruit, and several rounds of the coffeepot.

After the dinner there'll be contests. Fat men's, sack, three-legged, potato, and peanut races. For the women there is that old rip-snorter, a wagon race. Each contestant draws two horses, a wagon, and enough harness. First to drive around the track wins. The young cowboys with hair on their chests will show their guts in the bucking-bronco contest, twisting the broncs in approved style, and take part in the wild cow, wild mule, and surcingle races. But before that there are cigars and speeches and songs. Old Amos adds his rumblings to the "Nebraska Land":

"I've reached the land of drouth and heat,
Where nothing grows for man to eat.
For wind that blows with burning heat,
Nebraska Land is hard to beat."

About sundown the crowd scatters. Logan-Pomroy's motor roars up the hill. Without a good-bye Old Amos shuffles away through the brush down the river. The big day is over.

VI

But the sandhiller lives in the present also. The young folks take long car trips to dances that break up at midnight, by command of the law, and endeavor to spend most of the time until Sunday morning getting home. Sunday is a good day, for those who need it, to sleep off bad liquor. The more prosperous ranchers escape the cold by going south, the heat by going to the lakes. Some of these are old settlers noted for forty years of unfailing hospitality. They still entertain, when they are home, in comfortable ranch houses with frigid air and radios. Once their invitations, usually printed in the local items of the community paper, read something like this:

Party and dance at Bud Jennet's, April 2.
Dinner from one to seven.
Beds and breakfast for all.
Everybody welcome.

Seventy, eighty people would come in those days, some of them forty miles in wagons or on horseback. Next day the men slept between suggans in the haymow, the women all over the house. But that was when Yvette was a baby. Now she is home from college and formal bids, as she calls them, they have rounded up twenty guests for about four hours of housewarming in their new home. Some of them came a hundred miles, and it was worth the trip. There is an orchestra in the music room, with flowers from Alliance, and candles, Japanese prints framed in Chinese red, and tapestry panels.

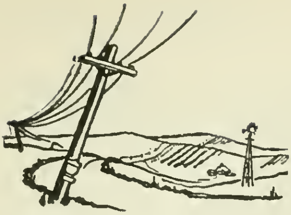
"Such a beautiful home!" the guests exclaim to Mrs. Jennet.

And in three hours the maid has the muss all cleared away.

There is no disputing the fact that the Jennets did well in cattle and potash. The callers were all prosperous and charming. Not like the Jennets' guests once were, when all who read the notice were welcome. Today nobody ate with starvation appetite. Nobody had to be thawed out at the hay-burner before he could sing "The Little Old Sod Shanty on the Claim" or play "There'll Be a Hot Time" on the fiddle or the accordion. Nobody let habitual curses slip and surely none of the guests today would ever think of singing:

Just plant me in a stretch of west,
Where coyotes mourn their kin.
Let hawses paw and tromp the mound
But don't you fence it in.

These people believe in sealed copper coffins in vaults, and they are decidedly not planted but laid to rest. And not one of them forgot himself so far as to ask about Bud Jennet, knowing that he must be in Alliance with his new lady friend, seeing that he wasn't to the housewarming.



After the Custer Battle

Albert J. Partoll

WHILE in quest of information on the Battle of the Little Big Horn, generally referred to as the Custer Battle, June 25, 1876, in Big Horn County, Montana, when the troops under General George A. Custer were annihilated by Sioux Indians, the Montana artist Edgar S. Paxson wrote to General Edward S. Godfrey for details of the battlefield and personnel. At the time Paxson was preparing to paint "Custer's Last Stand," which since has won wide attention for its vividness. He was rewarded with an enlightening letter presenting data and facts invaluable to him as an artist, and most interesting to the follower of Western history.

General Godfrey's letter describes the battlefield as seen by him and his associates immediately after the battle, and is reproduced here with acknowledgment and appreciation to Mrs. Edgar S. Paxson of Missoula, Montana.

San Carlos, Arizona
January 16, 1896

Mr. E. S. Paxson
Butte, Montana
Dear Sir:

Yours of Sept. 4th, [1895] was forwarded to me and would have been answered long ago but for our recent move and the fact that I have not had my property unpacked, so that I could have access to my notes, etc. It gives me pleasure to attend to your requests.

When you refer to my article, I suppose you refer to the one published in *Century,* Jan. 1892, and later quoted by President [E. Benjamin] Andrews [of Brown University], in *Scribner Monthly,* I think, June, 1895.

I have consulted some of my comrades, of whom a few are left in the regiment, that took part in the engagement, as to the details asked for.

I would suggest that you correspond with Major H. J. Nowlan, 7th Cavalry, Fort Sheridan, Ills., for further details, especially as to the lay of the bodies, for he gave that matter particular attention and made a sketch showing the locations at the time of burial, and the following year superintended the removal of the remains.

Your questions are answered in the order made:

1st: Gen. [George A.] Custer rode "Vic" into the fight: Vic was a sorrel, with four white feet and legs and a blaze in the face; he was not found on the field. I have heard that he had been identified in the possession of some Indian in the hostile camp after they went into the British possessions.

The dogs were left with the wagon train.

2nd: General Custer carried a Remington Sporting rifle, octagonal barrel; two Bulldog, self-cocking, English, white-handled pistols, with a ring in the butt for a lanyard; a hunting knife, in a beaded fringed scabbard; and a canvas cartridge belt. He wore a whitish gray hat, with broad brim and rather low crown, very similar to the Cowboy hat; buckskin suit, with a fringed welt in outer seams of trousers and arms of blouse; the blouse with double-breasted military buttons, lapels general open, turn-down collar, and fringe on bottom of shirt.

3rd: Captain Tom Custer was dressed about the same as the General. He was found near the top of the hill, North and a few yards from the General, lying on his face; his features were so pressed out of shape as to be almost beyond recognition; a number of arrows had been shot in his back, several in his head, one I remember, without the shaft, the head bent so that it could hardly be withdrawn; his skull was crushed and nearly all the hair scalped, except a very little on the nape of the neck.

The General was not mutilated at all; he laid on his back, his upper arms on the ground, the hands folded or so placed as to cross the body above the stomach; his position was natural and one that we had seen hundreds of times while taking cat naps during halts on the march. One hit was in the front of the left temple, and one in the left breast at or near the heart.

Boston [Custer], the youngest brother, was dressed similar to the other brothers; his body was found about two hundred yards from

"Custer Hill," between that and the Little Big Horn, at the foot of the ridge that runs up from the river, and as it were, forms the lower boundary of the battlefield. The body was stript except his white cotton socks and they had the name cut off.

4th: [Capt. George W.] Yates, [Lieut. Col. W. W.] Cooke, [Bvt. Lieut. A. E.] Smith, and [2nd Lieut. Wm. Van W. Reily] Reilley lay on Custer Hill in the vicinity of the General but nearer the top of the hill; the General's body was slightly down the slope, toward the river. [1st Lieut. James] Calhoun was in the vicinity of the hill, but farther removed from the others, as if he had been killed while going toward Custer, from the position of his troop on the left. [2nd Lieut. John Jordan] Crittenden was on the hill on the extreme left of the line (when facing the river). [Captain Myles W.] Keogh was in a depression just north or below Crittenden Hill and on the slope of the ridge that forms the defensive line furthest from the river; the body was stript, except the socks, and these had the names cut off; in life he wore a Catholic medal suspended from his neck; it was not removed.

All of the officers wore the dark blue shirt with rather wide falling collar, which when the blouse was worn, was over the blouse collar; most of them had cross-sabers and 7, like the old cap ornament, worked in white or yellow silk on the points of the collar.

Yates, Cooke, Smith, [1st Lieut. James E.] Porter, and Calhoun, and sometimes Keogh, wore buckskin blouses, but I don't think any of them wore other than blue trousers; [2nd Lieut. Henry M.] Harrington wore the blue blouse and white canvas trousers, with fringe on the outer seams. The day was very warm and few had any kind of blouse.

In describing the dress, I give it as generally worn, for when the bodies were found, after the fight, they were stript.

I found Porter's buckskin blouse in the village, while destroying the property, and from the shot holes in it, he must have had it on and must have been shot from the rear, left side, the bullet coming out on the left breast near the heart. Dr. [George E.] Lord and Lieutenants [James G.] Sturgis and Reilley wore the blue; Dr. Lord wore eye-glasses.

Sergeant Robert Hughes, Troop K, who carried the General's battle flag, was killed near the General on the hill. Nearly all the men wore the blue, but many, perhaps most of them, had their trousers reenforced with white canvas on the seat and on the legs from the knees half way up. Nearly every one wore the short top boot (that was then uniform) not high like those now worn, although a few of the officers wore the Wellington boot and had white canvas leggings.

5th: The command was armed with the Springfield and the Colt revolver; every officer carried a revolver. NO ONE CARRIED THE SABER. (Nearly every illustration I have seen of that fight or campaign has had the officers and men armed with the saber. Adam's painting "Custer's Last Fight," last winter presented to the regiment by Mr. Busch, has the men armed with the Winchester and the saber. In a historical painting, I think, if I may be allowed the suggestion, that the equipments, etc., should conform to those used at the time of the fight.) The bridles were different from the present pattern; the carbine socket was a small sack about 20-inches long in which was carried about 12 pounds of oats, strapped on the cantel; there was no hood on the stirrup used by the men.

6th: There were no "good Indians" left on the field after the time we saw it; they were all removed; our dead were alone. There were not so many dead ponies found on the field, nor many dead horses, indeed surprisingly few, and most of them were on or near Custer's Hill. It would seem that they were turned loose that the men might better defend themselves, or were wounded and broke away. The scene on the left (N & E of Crittenden Hill or near the point on the map marked "spring") where the Indians stampeded the "led horses" of Troops I and L, must have been a wild one; and their loss must have made their hearts very heavy and perhaps caused many a man to give up hope at the very beginning. A representation of that scene in the background would add immensely to the effect from the realistic point of view, whatever it might be from an artistic point!

Troops F, I and L had bay horses: Troop C had light sorrels, and Troop E had greys; the trumpeters rode greys; Cooke rode an almost white horse; as a rule the officers rode horses the same color as the troops to which they belonged.

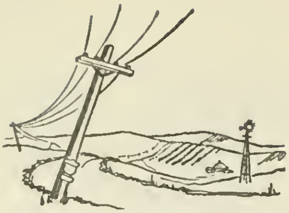
As to "accessories" on the battlefield, there were none. The marble white bodies, the somber brown of the dead horses and the dead ponies scattered all over the field, but thickest on and near Custer Hill, and the scattering tufts of reddish brown grass on the almost ashy white soil depicts a scene of loneliness and desolation that "bows down the heart in sorrow." I can never forget the sight: The early morning was bright, as we ascended to the top of the highest point whence the whole field came into view, with the sun to our backs. "What are those?" exclaimed several as they looked at what appeared to be white boulders. Nervously I took the field glasses and glanced at the objects; then almost dropped them, and laconically said: "The Dead!" Col. [B.] Weir who was near sitting on his horse, exclaimed: "Oh, how white they look! How white!" No, there were no "accessories"; everything of value was taken away: arms, ammunition, equipment and clothing. Occasionally, there was a body with a bloody undershirt or trousers or socks, but the name was invariably cut out. The naked mutilated bodies, with their bloody fatal wounds, were nearly unrecognizable, and presented a scene of sickening, ghastly horror! There were perhaps, a half dozen spades and shovels, as many axes, a couple of picks, and a few hatchets in the whole command; with these and knives and tin cups we went over the field and gave the bodies, where they lay, a scant covering of mother earth and left them, in that vast wilderness, hundreds of miles from civilization, friends and homes—to the wolves!

Yours Truly

E. S. Godfrey [*Signed*]
Cap't 7th Cavalry
Brevet Major U. S. Army

P. S. I leave for Fort Grant, Ariz., next week and about the last of Feb. for Fort Apache, Ariz.

E. S. G.



The Honey House

Mary King

HE came into her line of vision walking backward, easing himself around the young hackberry and pecan saplings in the overgrown path with his hands stretched out behind him. When he drew even with where she squatted in the blackberry vines, her gathered apron careful with turkey eggs, her hand reached into the nest to transfer another, she saw that he was laughing. His brown face was split in the middle over his teeth and creased about his eyes in profound and soundless mirth. The idiot, she thought, I wonder what he's been up to.

"Look out!" she said aloud. "You'll hang up on the berry vines."

With his heels planted on the path the way they had been going, the man swung his body on his hips and looked at her. He wasn't so young as she had first thought, seeing him from behind and then in profile: He was almost old. She dropped her eyes and completed the gesture interrupted when she had caught sight of him, lifting the egg her fingers had been circling and placing it in her apron with the others. His eyes traveled down her to the nest.

"Turkeys are no good here; they go wild," he said.

"I'm doin' all right."

"Looks that way. Hidin' out on you. They'll do it every time. You must have come a good piece . . . no house short of two miles." He drew a sack of tobacco from his shirt pocket and rolled a cigarette with awkward and inexpert fingers.

"I came quite a way," she admitted. "What were you laughin' at, backin' down the path like that, laughin' all to yourself?"

"Oh, that! . . . Oh, nothin' much." He was laughing again.

Crouched beside him on the path, she looked up curiously into his changed face. Smoke slid from the end of his cigarette and vanished between them. The frown and the question slipped from her face, and she laughed with him.

"This is my land," he said.

"I judged it was."

"I've never seen you around here before."

"I've never seen you either." She stood up, wanting her words to seem final, yet half-afraid that he would take them so. At her full height she was as tall as he, and broader. He was narrow and light moving, a quick man among trees. She didn't mind being caught trespassing on his land.

"That's different," he was saying; "everybody knows me."

"I don't. I never laid eyes on you before. You might be Adam and I wouldn't know."

"You'll know me if you live around here. You like my land all right."

"That ain't my fault. Turkeys are aimless creatures. A fence means nothin' to a turkey."

"Where do you live?" He looked at her shrewdly, noting with approval her deep body and strong hands, the lines in her fresh-colored face.

"Through the woods a piece," she answered. "At the bridge turn-off on the bayou road. Me and my husband just took the place."

"If you just took it, why has your turkey hen laid a nestful of eggs? She must be a quick one."

"You're kind of quick yourself. The turkeys came with the place. We're from Sudan, in the next county. Thought we'd try farming for a while. Searls did. I don't care."

"I know your land; I used to own it. I sold it for taxes . . . stump land. . . . What have you planted?"

"Cotton, some corn."

"You won't get far without niggers. Nigger work, stump land is. No white man's job."

"I guess you got niggers to do your work? I guess you don't turn a hand yourself?" She eyed his faded blue shirt and khaki pants, both molded to him from much wear, and bulging at the pockets as a man's clothes do when they are put on from the clothesline without pressing. She was half-turned from him now, speaking over her shoulder in the way of one who should go and yet liked the sound of voices in the quiet place where she had not expected to find them, and found pleasant the consideration of her words by this man whose sudden presence had called them forth.

While speaking of the land his face had been sober, but now it creased again into laughter and she knew that this was what she had been lingering to see. "I got niggers or they got me, whicheverway you look at it," he said. "Why don't you come see my place? It's only a little piece through the woods, closer than yours by a good three-quarter mile. Come, and I'll give you a drink before you walk back."

"The eggs'll get cold. I want to set them under a hen while they're still warm. . . . I'd like a drink, though. . . . I've been real thirsty for a long time."

He looked at the eggs gathered close to her body. "They'll keep warm. I'd like you to come."

He stooped and swept the vines away from the path, and she, drawn forward by the motion of his arm, stepped up beside him through the gate he had opened.

"All right, I'll come. I guess there's time."

When the path narrowed he walked ahead, holding the branches back for her. She followed dreamily, glad for an excuse to prolong her quiet walking in the open. It was not often she got away from the house for this long, on an errand that did not carry with its consummation a definite hour of return. Since dinnertime she had been searching, and by the sun it was now well past four. It was not often she got away from Searls for this long either. Heavy and cumbersome, he usually trod in time with her thoughts even when he did not accompany her in person. But she had shed him somewhere back among the trees during her hours of lonely hunting, and now, even though she was a little tired, she felt herself following lightly in the narrow tracks of the man ahead, bending aside to avoid a tree when he bent aside, stooping when he stooped under a low branch, her body adapting itself unconsciously to his swinging motion.

Half-drunk on sunlight, her lids lowered over her eyes, she followed him. The way was farther than she had thought it would be, or maybe it seemed far because the sight of no familiar landmarks clocked the light monotony of her passage.

As she walked forward, her thoughts doubled and retraced their way to the turkey nest in the briars and to her first sight of the man's back, repossessing the time and place of meeting. By the time they returned to her the blue and brown figure ahead was clothed in long familiarity. Her eyes, rejecting the strangeness of her surroundings, accepted him from the alert back of his head to his run-down heels as her feet accepted without question or hesitation the uneven turnings of the path.

He strode ahead, drawing her along behind him in a wake of rustling foliage. She wondered amusedly what he carried in his hip pocket. One side of his flat buttocks bulged in a grotesque caricature of a woman's swaying hip. Probably an extra packet of tobacco and a bandana handkerchief, she thought.

They passed through the young growth into taller trees less choked with underbrush, the land looking as if it might have been cleared at one time, and he dropped back and walked beside her. She evened her steps in care for the eggs in her apron, and now it was he who suited his stride to the shorter and more cautious rhythm of her motion. The land sank away toward a point she knew must be the river, for its color changed, glowing a deep red through the scratchy covering.

They stepped into the furrows of a cornfield. The man raised his hand in silent greeting to the plowing Negro who stopped his mule, removed his hat, and remained motionless, staring after them. She saw a cabin off to one side of the clearing, and from this point also felt herself observed, although a quick glance revealed nothing at the window but pink curtains looped back upon a shadowy interior, and strung across the door, a tattered sheet that swung gently outward in a draft.

"There's my house," he said. He stopped on the edge of the field and surveyed the scene before him, and there was that about him which let her know that he had stood on just this spot many times before, labeling all he saw with passive irony. She had a feeling that if she had come on this scene by herself her eyes would have passed over it, that the man beside her alone had power to call it into visibility, himself being the core of the picture, and the rest taking shape from his regard.

She saw a big ruined house on a knoll beside the river. Around the house, partly hiding it, grew a grove of moss-hung live oaks. The trees were enormous, both the living and the dead, and their shadow spread a contagion of darkness upon the bare ground around the encircled house. The house itself was like a picture of a house that children draw, all lines from a solid base leaning obliquely toward the river, as a deaf man might lean to listen with a hand cupped to his ear. From the look of the outside she knew that the sound of a footstep in a lower room would echo to the attic, and that a man living alone in it must hear the reflection of his presence thrown back at him from all sides, must live day after day surrounded by the sound of his own coming and going.

"I know now who you are," she said. "You're Andrew Taboney. I heard about you."

"And who are you?"

"I'm Ellen Dick."

He led the way up the path, across the porch, and into the wide hall that ran the depth of the house and showed her, at the end of it, the cut bank of a bayou grown over with elders in white bloom. They stood just inside the door, she, holding the apronful of eggs, blinking her sun-filled eyes in the unaccustomed dimness, smelling the musty fragrance of old wood, and nearer, the bright bitter odor of the man himself.

"Listen!" he said.

As the outside sounds dropped away she became aware of a low humming, a soft monotonous droning that seemed to come from all around her.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Bees."

"In the house? Where do you keep them?"

"I don't. They keep themselves. They're in the walls."

"Millions, they sound like. How did they get in? Don't they bother you? Don't they ever sting?"

"Through the weatherboarding, cracks around the chimney, through the front door here—it's seldom closed. No, they don't sting. Just make honey."

"Well! So you could live on honey!"

"I don't disturb it. Why should I? I've plenty to eat."

"Oh, I don't know. Seems funny, that's all . . . all that honey right here in your walls, a regular honeycomb, and you not touchin' it."

"Any woman would say the same."

He walked ahead of her through the hall and out to a pump in the back yard. He kicked a box and motioned her toward it.

"Sit down while I pump the water cool."

The eggs had grown a burdensome weight. Supporting her apron with a hand, she eased herself down upon the box and looked around her. Chickens scratched in a wire-enclosed yard. In a skimpy garden weeds and vegetables fought silently. The elder-grown bayou was behind her; from it sounded the working hum of bees. Here, then, was where most of the honey came from. Elder-flower honey. On one side of the clearing the woods came close; on the other side ran the river, with woods beginning again on its far bank. The place was peaceful and desolate in the late afternoon sunlight, disturbed only by the sound of bees and the rasping strokes of the pump.

Her eyes closed sleepily, shutting out all except the slender arc of the man's body curving up and down over the pump handle, his blue shirt bright against the green beyond. She felt tired and heavy, as if she would like never to move again, as if all the steps she had ever taken had been leading her toward this spot and now she was content to sit and rest without thinking. She wished vaguely for an answering quiet in the man, but now he was rinsing a tin cup, filling it, and bringing it to her. He stood over her, offering the cool water, and she took the cup and tilted it to her mouth.

"It's quiet here," she sighed, when she had finished drinking.

"You're tired. Why don't you put those eggs down and rest a while? They'll keep warm in the sun."

"No. I guess not."

"I've got a broody hen. We'll put 'em under her and they'll be all right. Come, stand up! Then you can rest."

Suddenly wide awake, Ellen rose to her feet. She searched the man's eyes intently for a moment, and then spoke, setting her words down softly and carefully to bridge the silence between them, a way held open for retreat.

"She won't take them. They're strange; not her own."

"Don't worry."

Without waiting for her reply, he strode to the chicken yard and unlatched the gate. His voice came to her muffled from his head lowered over a coop. "There's plenty of room. Just bring 'em here."

She came and stood beside him. She passed the eggs to him one at a time and he, taking them, pushed them gently under the hen. The hen drove her beak at his hand; then, swelling her warm feathers, accepted the eggs and settled into her former position—finality, completion in the closing down of her wings. The woman's lids drooped.

She watched the man dreamily, noting the sure way his hands moved about the box, drawing the sliding door half-shut again, setting a pan of water within reach. He straightened up and wiped his hands down the front of his thighs.

"You got a handkerchief in your pocket," she said.

"You know, don't you?"

"Yeah."

He pulled the blue bandana from his hip pocket and passed it over his face.

"You're a handy man. Not many men could touch a settin' hen without throwin' her into fits."

He laughed. He came close to her and put his hands on her shoulders. "You're a good woman, Ellen. I saw that right away. A good woman for a man to have, a smart woman. Your turkeys would do better here."

"What made you laugh? I been studying what could make you laugh like I seen you laughin' back yonder in the woods."

His body was hard and inquisitive. As it had happened on the path in the woods, she found herself laughing with him.

"What a strange man you are!" she said. "And you got silver in your pockets; I hear it jingle . . . walkin' through the woods backwards, laughin', with silver on your leg . . . I'll stay."

On the second morning Andrew left the house early with his gun. Ellen worked for a while in the garden, pulling the grass away from young carrots and beets, and when the sun began to burn her back, she crept under the elders on the bayou bank to rest.

"Hello! Hello! Anybody home?" The voice roused her and she sat up. Searls was standing at the back door of the house.

"Here!" she answered, and he came toward her, walking through the garden.

"Ellen, I been worried sick! What're you doin' here? I been searchin' the woods; thought you was lost."

"I been all right, safe enough. I like it here."

"This is Andrew Taboney's place, ain't it? I haven't told anybody; nobody knows you been gone. What made you run away? These woods're full of niggers. But nobody knows you been gone."

"As for niggers, I seen maybe two or three. They tend to their business and I tend to mine."

"God knows, it's a forsaken place," he said, "away off from anywheres." His head turned to follow the steady flight of bees between elders and house. A bee, heavy with nectar, clung to his leg, and he beat it off with his hat. "Where all these bees come from?"

"The house. They live in the house, in the walls."

"I hear them." He looked at her with his brows drawn together, unable to find her familiar in her new surroundings. She had always been a busy woman, and here it was high morning and she was not only idle but sleepy, lying in the sun of a strange man's garden, leaving all work to the bees.

"Where's Taboney?"

"It's a pleasant sound. . . . I never seen so many bees before."

"Ellen, is this a way to do me? Come on back and I'll forget about it. I know crazy things come into a woman's head at times and she acts without cause. We'll just forget about it, and you come on home with me. I can't handle all the work myself. The corn we planted needs choppin', and who'll tend the turkeys?"

He was not angry, she saw; only hurt and puzzled. He stood before her looking humbly on the ground, slapping his leg with his doubled-up hat. His pleading voice changed her pity to contempt. Her eyes picked the square of neat stitches in the knee of his overalls. Often she had wished that she need not patch his pants, for it seemed to her that she patched his dignity instead. Going or coming, she had fenced his tatters even from her own eyes, yet all her protection had not served to hold him up. Guarded, he still drooped. His heavy shoulders hung slack. His legs bent at the knees. She thought of Andrew's straight back.

"Go on home, Searls," she said. "You had your time. You gave me nothin' but work, a heavy weight on me day and night. It's peaceful here. You go on home. Maybe I'll come back some day."

"Ellen. . . ."

"Go on home. You got no cause to be here."

"Well," he sighed, "if your mind's made up, it won't do me any good to see Taboney, no good I can see. I don't want a fight. I'm a peaceful man, and much as I hate to see you here I won't fight about it. You come on home when you get ready. I guess it'll be the same with me."

"All right," she said contemptuously. She watched him off through the trees. Coming toward a woman a man might stoop, might bend forward with his hands before him, feeling his way—but not leaving a woman. When a man left a woman his back should be straight.

That night she told Andrew of the visit and they laughed together. "What makes you hate him so?" Andrew asked curiously.

"I don't hate him; he just tires me, he's hard to move around. I mean I always felt him heavy on my mind, hard to push around, like. Oh, I don't know. Bein' around him was like bein' out somewheres with an umbrella you started out carryin', thinkin' it would rain, and then it turned off not to rain, and me with a big heavy umbrella and no place to lay it down. There was just no gettin' rid of him till I came away. . . . That was it."

"And I'm a little man so I don't bother you? You can just forget all about me? I don't weigh on you, so you like me? Is that it?"

The room was warm and quiet. Through the open hall door the low moon poked a finger of light across the worn boards of the inner threshold. From the woods an owl spoke.

"You ain't here at all," she answered. "You're somewhere else, I don't know where. What makes you laugh so much, over nothin' I can see? But I like it. What made you laugh back there in the woods that day? I'd give a lot to know."

Life in the new place settled evenly about Ellen's shoulders through the days that followed, and she gave herself up to the release of complete concealment. She had lived always in town, within call of neighbors, her thoughts pushed this way and that by currents from passing vehicles and voices. Now, for the first time in her life, she knew quietness. The sun, the droning bees, the man, Andrew Taboney, moving lightly in his direct yet aimless fashion, all conspired to put a kind of sleep upon her. For a time, it is true, the presence of the bees in the house annoyed her with a sense of unfitness. Her fancy, piercing the walls, saw them weaving in insolent clusters that dared her broom. But soon she came to think differently. The unending hum of the bees' labor soothed her as no complete silence could have done.

No road ran past the house. The trails that wound to and from the Negro cabins—and she had come to find that there were a dozen or so of these scattered along the river bank, each in its small clearing of field and garden—served only to deepen her sense of isolation. Any trouble which might have found its way to her through the labyrinth of footpaths, the trees by the house themselves deflected, so that she woke and drowsed and slept at the very core of a humming quiet.

Day after day this quiet was broken only by the rattle of trace chains as Francis worked the corn near the house, the thud of mule's feet down the furrows, the crow calls, and the ruffling sound of leaves. The soft voices of the Negroes she sometimes heard, but she saw none of them close except Francis. The woman called Weezie, who was his wife, kept well out of sight. There was a child in the cabin too, she learned, but she never saw him except at a distance, following Francis in the field.

Except for the two rooms in which she and Andrew lived, the big house was bare and empty. There was little work for her to do after the cooking of meals and washing of dishes was over. Andrew sent Francis to town for the things she needed, and she seldom thought of her own house or of Searls. Sometimes Andrew went off with his gun alone in the woods, sometimes he took her with him. Or again, he might work for a day or two in the field helping Francis, or with her in the garden.

At one end of the garden, on the bank of the bayou, was a hidden place under the elders where they often lay together. At such times, while her hands searched his hard body to find the soft places, she puzzled over this ability of his to forget work for play. Alone, or with Searls, she would not have dared to leave work unfinished once she had begun it. At first, even with Andrew, she had been prodded by the guilty remembrance of tasks dropped before their completion. But after a while she came to accept his haphazard way of living as she had accepted the industry of the bees—the one seeming to complement the other—and the unaccountable partitions of their days made time seem longer and more richly colored. By evening, often she could not remember what she had done in the morning, the morning seemed so far away. And this fact also served her for concealment. If she could not retrace her steps to the beginning of the day just passed, how could she be expected to find her way back through the many days that had intervened since she had followed Andrew down the path from the turkey nest, or remember the uneven windings of the path itself, on past the turkey nest and back to Searls? These vague thoughts came and went in her mind as she drew her hiding more closely about her.

The turkey eggs hatched. She counted fourteen. The hen did not lead them to the woods as a turkey mother might have done, but kept them close about the yard and garden where they thrived unmolested. She tended them with pleasure.

Often she would coax Andrew to talk about himself, watching his face intently for the clue to his laughter which his words never gave her. She learned that his family was an old one, house and lands coming to him through his grandfather, whose father had come to Texas from Virginia long before the War Between the States and hollowed out his plantation from the rich river-bottom land. Yes, there had been other plantations along the river, but they had gone back to woods. Yes, these Negroes were the descendants of his grandfather's slaves. He, Andrew, gave them the land. It was really theirs anyhow. They paid no rent. He had been away to school. He had joined the Army and gone to France. When the war was over he had come home. No, he had never married. Why should he? Yes, he owned much land; he was land-poor. Some of the land along the road he had sold; most of it nobody would buy. But it was quiet here, with not too many worries. Country Negroes were a peaceful people for the most part, easy to get along with. He was content, his own master, his time belonging to no man except himself.

". . . to no woman either," he said. They were lying under the elders. She leaned on one elbow and studied his face, what part of it she could see under his upflung arm, and wondered if any woman had ever owned his time.

As always, when she saw his face unmoved by the quick changes given it by laughter, she was struck by its age. He could hardly be much older than herself; yet now, looking down on him, he seemed years older. Suddenly, she knew that she wanted him to be old, would be glad if he never laughed again. Old, he seemed forlorn; his life, shaped by no purpose, utterly wasted. A man needing a woman. Looking at his few dusty fowls, his shell of a house, his ill-tended garden, all exposed for what they were in the pitiless sunshine, she tried to conjure up some way of thought by which he and all he owned should not seem wasted, and she could think of nothing to absolve him except her own forbearance. In quick pity and tenderness she bent down and kissed his cheek.

He uncovered his face and looked at her with blue, mocking eyes, then crooked his elbow about her neck and drew her down beside him, ruffling her hair with his free hand.

"You're good, Ellen, good and quiet, good to have. Better than any white woman I ever had." Laughter was beginning to curl around his eyes.

"No!" she said sharply, pulling away from him. "Don't! You're always laughin' at me."

But he was bending over her, laughing into her face. "You want my time, Ellen? You got all my time now. What more do you want?"

Transformed by one of his quick changes, he was completely strange to her. About his whole body when he moved was a nameless quality she knew despairingly would never be old. Even as she drew him to her she was deeply and resentfully aware of her own face no longer young, of her own thick body which had once been as slender as his. She shut her eyes against the sunlight.

The young turkeys shed their baby fluff and grew long-legged and rangy. The hen had a hard time keeping up with them. They left the hen and took to the woods. Ellen did not want to lose one of the fourteen, and so she searched for them and drove them home. They came to know the sound of her voice.

In the evenings Ellen and Andrew bathed by the pump in the back yard. Seeing the man white in the lamplight from the window, she knew that the years had done him a service. The years had pared him thin, concentrating him in the narrowing enclosure of his body until the very concentration seemed a purpose of itself, needing no utterance beyond the speaking line of shoulder and hip as he moved. He was as aloof and intent within himself as some hard, clean animal; and she, conscious of the soft spreading of her own body, was again resentful that in her very nature she should seem to reach, he to withdraw. And she knew that she was always reaching, always striving to find her way to the mysterious source of his youth from which his laughter came. Her first curiosity, lulled to sleep for a time, awoke, strengthened into hunger. The man had a secret she was taut with desire to discover and possess. Sometimes she thought his laughter came from her, and was pleased even in her resentment at being thus fed upon; and then she would remember that she had seen his laughter before he had laid eyes upon her, and would be more baffled than before.

The elder flowers dropped away. The succulent stalks hardened in the August heat and stood up to bear their seed, and then wilted quietly down over their roots, their strength retreating underground to wait out the winter.

The coming of fall caught Ellen unaware. One morning she stepped outdoors and crunched an acorn underfoot. Overnight, a great hand had shaken the oaks. All around her the ground was heaped with small, hard, round bodies, brown and shining, tipped with yellow at the butt. Dead bees, they looked like. And then she realized that the humming in the walls of the house had fallen away. The bees were quieting down for the winter.

The next day a cold rain kept the man and the woman indoors. For a while they slept, curled together in bed. In the afternoon Andrew dressed and wandered restlessly about the house. His footsteps echoed in the silence. Watching him, she partook of his restlessness. He moved much, yet nothing spoke of his passing: no new order of things, no gathering together, no harvest. The sound of rain could not erase the lost murmuring of the bees. The soft thud of falling acorns from the trees close by the house was like a long burial that would continue without ceasing until the old trees had cleansed themselves of the summer's fruit. When supper was over, Andrew said:

"Weezie will come tomorrow and wash the blankets. She knows where they are."

"I can do it; I can wash."

"No need. Weezie'll do it as she always does."

Early the next morning Ellen awoke to the sound of voices on the back porch. Weezie had come and was speaking to Andrew.

"Summer's all right maybe . . . but winter . . . we stay in that cabin all winter we need a new roof . . . and other things. . . ."

"All right, I'll fix your roof."

"We stayin' the winter?"

"Send Francis over after dinner and I'll give him the order for shingles."

Ellen dressed and went out to them. The rain had stopped; the sun was coming up over the trees into a clear sky; the air was cold and sparkling. Andrew had gone away without his breakfast. Weezie was bending over a box piled in the stacked rubbish against the house wall. At the back door a little boy dressed in overalls and jumper was picking up acorns. Weezie heard Ellen's step.

"Run on back home, you!" she called to the child. "White woman don't want you hangin' 'round her house."

"I don't mind, let him stay."

"He better off home. Mist' Andrew say he better off home." The little boy ran obediently around the corner of the house and disappeared.

Ellen was glad for a woman to talk with, and wondered why she had not thought of making friends with Weezie before. "What's this about your roof, Weezie?"

The Negress was young and comely. Her skin was the polished color of brown oak leaves, but her face was sullen. She whipped blankets from the box and tossed them into a tub.

"Yes'm, it leaks bad. We ain't never lived in that shack till last summer."

"No? You come from town?"

Weezie did not answer. The rest of the morning she ignored Ellen. When the blankets were washed and hung on the line, she went away and Ellen was left alone.

All day Andrew did not come back. She saw that his gun was missing and surmised that he had gone to the marsh for duck. For the past week long strings of duck and geese had been going by, settling down over the woods to the south.

She wandered through the empty rooms of the big house, now and then tapping the walls, but she got no response from the bees. The sun turned warm and the wind dropped, but she did not go out. The earth seemed no longer friendly. The garden furrows ran water. The place where the elders had stood on the bayou bank was sodden with wet leaves. Winter would keep her walking.

In the upper rooms the windowpanes buzzed with drunken wasps trying to get outside. The sound they made was thin and angry, unlike the full lazy droning of the bees. She found an old paper, folded it, and brushed at the wasps, grinding them underfoot when they fell to the floor, shrinking at the sound of crunching bodies but working doggedly until she had cleared all windows, and the floors were littered with disjointed heads and wings and stinging abdomens. All afternoon she worked at her useless labor, and went below to wait for Andrew only at dark.

The chill returned with evening. She carried in the soft dry blankets from the line. When she had tolled the young turkeys into the yard she brought wood and built a fire in the fireplace of the room where they slept. It was ten o'clock before Andrew came. He came empty-handed.

"I thought you'd be asleep," he said.

"No."

"I stopped at a cabin down the river and had the woman cook for me. One duck—all I got. They're scary. Too many hunters out from town."

"Did you have enough to eat?"

"Oh, sure. . . . The fire feels good."

The morning was a long way off, farther away from the evening than she could remember a morning ever having been, but she could retrace her way in a straight line to its beginning. She did this, sitting by the fire while Andrew drew off his boots. By the time he came to sit on the floor beside her, closeness was no longer between them. Between them shivered the long bright lonely day: the unknown table at which he had eaten, the miles of wet woods he had tramped, the dead bodies of wasps, Weezie's sullen brown face, the little boy hurrying obediently away. All things today had seemed to hurry from her. Through no fault of hers the distance had come.

He lay stretched beside her on the floor. The firelight glinted on his belt buckle. Shielding her eyes with her hand, she watched the shining metal rise and fall with his deep breathing. Tired out, he slept on the floor. Any other man would have gone straight to bed, she thought. It was like Andrew to fling himself carelessly on the floor like a dog and drop into slumber with her eyes upon him.

Wind whistled through the crack under the door and set the firelight dancing. Upstairs the windows rattled. She fancied she could still hear the acorns falling. The light flickered on Andrew's sleeping face, fresh-colored from his day in the windy woods, now curiously smoothed out and rested, young, in its quietness, as she had never seen it before except in laughter. Hating his aloofness, she stooped over him to unbutton his clothes and get him into bed. She slipped the catch of his belt buckle and he stirred and sat up, wide awake after his nap.

He was too young for her. There was something almost frightening in the youth that made love to her in this ruined house. He was like a ghost, a strange bright ghost, untouched by time or by any of the worries that made an ordinary man grow stooped and heavy and easy to possess.

In the morning she looked at his sleeping face, trying to identify him with the man of the night before. The man she saw was old, an object of pity, almost of contempt. Which of the two men held her —the young or the old? She could not solve this puzzle.

For some reason Francis did not come to get the order for the shingles. Throughout the day Ellen listened for his step, or for Weezie's, but neither came. Andrew had disappeared after breakfast. She was again alone. Toward dark she went to drive in the turkeys. She passed around the dry cornfield, made a wide circle in the woods, and came out behind the cabin where Weezie and Francis lived. As she walked through the back yard, past the lighted window, the shining of a mallard's wing caught her eye. She went home wondering. She found the turkeys on the bayou bank and drove them into the yard. Francis might easily have shot the duck. She had no real reason to believe that Weezie had cooked Andrew's supper the night before.

"What's the matter, Ellen?" Andrew came in silently, hung his hat on the nail behind the door, and brushed her cheek with his lips as she stood beside the stove. His lips were the hard cold lips of a man who has been away in the wind.

"Nothin'," she answered.

"Got a grouch? Why don't you be like you used to be? You were a lot of fun, I seem to remember."

"Where have you been all day?"

"Now don't start that. Since you ask, I've been to town to see about shingles. I've no money for shingles now. I had to arrange an account. Weezie's house is in bad shape; needs a new roof."

"There's things you could do here in your own house . . . new windowpanes, a little paint . . . a lot of things."

"Why should that matter to you?"

"No reason. I just happened to think."

"Well, don't! It won't get you anywhere."

When they had eaten he took a paper from his coat pocket, sat down beside the lamp, and began to read. He was smoking a new pipe, also brought from town. His shadow to Ellen was strange upon the wall. She sat apart from him, hugging her knees, listening to the wind.

"Miss Ellen, Miss Ellen!" called a soft voice outside.

Ellen moved from her place by the fire and went to see who the caller might be. Weezie's little boy stood on the top step blinking up at her. This was the first time she had seen him close. She looked at him curiously.

"What do you want?"

"Mama say to find out if Mist' Andrew got the shingles?"

Ellen closed the door to a crack so that Andrew might not hear. She still had a light on the boy's face. She stepped closer to him, impelled by something deeper now than curiosity. She took his face between her hands and regarded him intently. He wriggled, laughed, and tried to break away, but she held him.

"What's your name?"

The little boy rolled his eyes. Yes, those were Andrew's eyes in a face colored like honey . . . the shape of his head . . . his laughter. Here was what had drawn her down the path from the turkey nest; here was Andrew's youth. It was as simple as that. By the child's clear face the man was forever divested of every claim to what he had given away. His laughter? What fool thing he stretched his mouth over meant nothing to her now. Having thought this, she considered with surprise that it was true, and knew also that her knowledge was of long growing and for months had needed only a sight of the child's face to spring into anger. Standing with her back to the door of the house, her skirt whipping her cold legs, she stared across the child's head into the whimpering wood and waited for her anger to come to her.

"Mama say to ask if you goin' to stay all winter?" The child watched her eagerly, hunching his thin little shoulders under his jumper coat, dancing on his bare feet to keep them warm.

"Why does she want to know that?" Ellen spoke the question softly. She knew the answer—had known it long. The bees were not the only strangers sheltered by the old house from winter. Well, winter had come and Weezie was tired waiting.

"We lived here till you came las' summer."

"Yes, I know." She felt no anger. She was silent for a minute, and then said slowly, "Well, run along home. Tell your mother the shingles'll be out in a day or two."

The child ran away through the darkness toward the cabin. Ellen closed the door and went to sit again by the fire. Andrew still sprawled in his chair by the lamp. He had heard nothing. She watched the crease in his brown cheek deepen and darken as his lips fondled the stem of his pipe. Every now and then his mouth opened to let out a plump cloud of smoke with the faint plop of a stopper pulled out of a bottle. Ellen counted the sounds, thinking idly how settled the man looked, how old and heavy, heavier than Searls. With this thought came pity, not for him, but for herself. She huddled her shoulders and drew the collar of her dress about her throat. One of the stray cats that lived about the place pushed open the door, paddled by her, softly close, brushing her skirt, and settled itself on the warm bricks before the fire. Full and contented it lay at her feet, dabbing its licked paws over its ears.

"Your cat caught him a field rat," the woman said heavily. The man looked up from his paper.

"What? . . . Oh! He'd do better to catch the rats in the house."

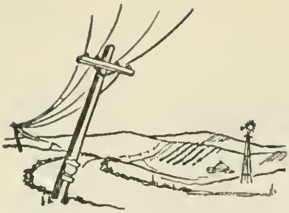
"I know," said Ellen. "I know now."

"What's that?" He lifted his eyes again from the paper and looked at her. "You say something?"

"No, I guess not. No, I didn't say. . . ."

They sat apart, each owning a separate warmth from the burning logs. Between them the smoke drew fiercely up the chimney and away into the windy night. Ellen closed her eyes and listened to the soft rushing of the flames. She saw the footpath winding back among the trees, away from the river, through the pecan and hackberry saplings that had grown maybe an inch taller, on past the briars where the turkey nest had been, and back the way she had come. The old man who sat reading by the fire would not try to stop her.

The sky was lightening when she rose from bed, dressed, and went silently from the house. From the crib she took four ears of corn, and she opened the latch on the chicken yard and spoke to the turkeys already down from their perches and stirring about uneasily. Making a trail with the corn she led them through the yard, across the corn stubble, past the sleeping cabin and into the woods. Her feet found easily the path she had taken in the summer, and she went along it, dropping the bright yellow grains of corn, drawing the hungry young turkeys after her through the still woods.



The Country Doctor

Ivan Beede

WHILE Dr. Moon waited for a telephone call from the Masheks' it began to snow. A shadow fell across the book he was reading and slowly, slowly the pale winter light thickened into obscurity. He raised his head to look out the window, then with an effort swung it around and glanced about the room. Although the electric switch was only a few feet away, he felt too hopeless to move. Instead, he let his head fall to one side in a gesture of fatigue, and closed his eyes.

All this Sunday afternoon, alone in the house, he had been expecting the Mashek call. Sooner or later it would come and he would have to look at Lily Mashek's deluded smile again. There was nothing more he could do for her; she was beyond aid; but just the same he would go. He felt obliged to go, because last night he had acted like a fool, on her account.

With his head fallen limply, his body slumped in the chair, he waited helplessly for the call to come. He could think of nothing else. The case depressed him, with a depression which he could not shake off, which had been increasing for days.

It was not Lily Mashek so much as the moment she had chosen to die. She had forced herself on his attention just after the long siege of influenza, which had left him physically exhausted, discouraged, and worried by new, strange doubts.

During the epidemic he had been the only available doctor, the others being still absent in the army, and, as usual, he had taken his work too seriously. He had seemed an almost omnipresent figure in his big fur coat and hunter's cap, his mild face masklike with fatigue. There was no distance he would not drive, no extra effort he would not make, but too many of his patients died. They died by the dozens, throughout the fall and these early months of winter.

The growing toll of deaths threw him into a fit of black discouragement. He was certain that almost any other doctor would have been more useful. But what hurt him most, when he suffered from his own shortcomings so keenly, was to lose patients (and he lost many) who had no right to die. It was dreadful to see them give up without a struggle, killed by fear of the unknown, by lack of faith in themselves, by spiritual panic deriving from the war. Some of them were men whom for years he had respected. He watched them go with tears of anger in his eyes. They were cowards; they did not deserve to live; yet he blamed himself because they died.

When it was all over he was left in a state of mental depression induced by fatigue. He had not only temporarily lost confidence in himself, he was harassed by secret doubts, doubts which he thought too terrible to divulge, about the humanity he had always been so proud to serve. He knew what was wrong. He needed time to forget, to renew his hold on life, but at this moment Lily Mashek fell mortally ill.

He had been her doctor for years, and the spectacle of her life had always annoyed him, but now it took on an exaggerated significance in his mind. She symbolized all the weakness, the fatuity, the shame, of the world he had just discovered. To go to that dismal house, to look at her silly smile, grew more and more unbearable, and, several days before, it seemed he had reached the limit of his patience.

And then last night the nurse had called him up. Her name was Mrs. Thorpe, and she had come from Omaha to help with the influenza cases. He disliked her brisk, efficient ways and the professional manner of her speech. "I think she's going, Moon. Will you come right over?"

He was in bed, with the extension phone pulled to his side. The dry sharp voice seemed slightly less metallic than the vibration of the receiver. "No, I will not come over," he answered at once, with irrational rage. "I'm in bed. Do you think I'm going to get up and dress just to go over there? There's nothing more I can do."

Mrs. Thorpe's voice buzzed on. It was the reproving voice of humanity. He listened a second to the rasping in his ear, and then without a word slammed the receiver. He did not intend to get out of bed.

But he did get up. He was lying with his hands over his stomach when his wife came in from her room. "What is it, Doctor? Is anything the matter?" "No," he said, sick with discouragement, "nothing's the matter." He climbed out of bed, put on his clothes over his nightshirt, and concealing this makeshift under his coat of fur, went down to the speakeasy. After filling himself full of port, he was able to come home and sleep.

But this morning he felt conscience-stricken and made a call at the Masheks'. He found the nurse coldly superior, and Lily not dead, after all. There was really nothing to do—there had been nothing last night—but he told Mrs. Thorpe to keep in touch with him through the day. And now when the telephone rang he would go over there again, to no purpose.

He stirred helplessly, and suddenly the book slid from his lap to the floor, pulling his hand with it. He sat there for a moment as he was, with one arm hanging loose, his mind, like his body, seeming scattered and formless.

With an effort he pulled himself together, picked the book up from the floor, and walked to the window. His head whirled with vertigo; his ears rang; stars streaked across his eyelids. The dizziness passed, and then he looked through the snow at the lonely street lined with square wooden houses. The snow was dropping monotonously, straight from the sky, melting as fast as it fell. While he watched, the flakes thickened, the grey deepened, and fringes of white formed on the bare spots of the lawn.

The telephone rang. It was as he expected. Lily was worse again.

He donned his overcoat and cap, discovered that he was still wearing slippers, changed to his shoes, and closed the door of the house.

The snow fell on him in a steady, unending rhythm; on his cap, his shoulders, his nose. He could see only two hundred feet ahead; there were no lights in the houses; the town seemed deserted, tenantless. He walked along a lane of bare trees, through the snow, toward the twilight, alone. He had never felt so alone, and because of his depression his thoughts took on the complexion of the day. He saw the whole world living in these frail, sad houses, in the midst of desolation; victims of the weather, of vague fears, and senseless delusions. It weighed heavily on his spirit. If mankind did not have dignity, how could he hold up his own head? Besides, the humanity to which he ministered with his beautiful hands had to have dignity.

And Lily Mashek! It was as if she had been unconscious all her life, and she really had that air about her. She was always running from one delusion to another, never touching reality. When Joe took to drink and began to beat her, she turned prohibitionist and tried to save his soul. All these years she had borne up with him, while her expression grew more angelic. And the reason was not because she loved Joe, but because people praised her fortitude and called her a saint.

And now . . . now she was dying with a happy smile on her face because Joe had promised never to drink again. Joe reform! In a month he would be drunk; in six months he would be beating up some other woman. It was maddening.

The Mashek house was on the east edge of town, near the ice pond. Years ago it had been painted pink, but now it loomed through the snow a kind of livid grey, sitting abjectly on a little rise of ground, a tall narrow house on a high foundation, looking both obscene and startled in the abandoned yard. He went up the path—there was no walk—and stamped the wet snow from his shoes on the porch.

A strange young man answered the door. At first he could not make out who it was. Then he recognized the Mashek boy, who must have arrived since morning. While the son pumped his hand, Dr. Moon remembered him unpleasantly. As a boy he had fought with Joe on the streets, and later had run away.

Going to the stairs, he discovered Joe sitting by the table, with his head in his arms. The old man straightened up as he passed.

"It's no good, Doc. She's going to die."

"We'll see, Joe."

"Come on, Joe," he heard the son say from the dimness. "Don't bother Doc. You know what's going to happen as well as he does."

Dr. Moon went up the stairs to the sickroom. As soon as he opened the door Mrs. Thorpe hurried on tiptoe toward him. She lifted the sick-chart from the bedstand and handed it to him.

She jarred on his nerves.

"Give her some air," he said. "You don't want to choke her, do you?"

He put down the chart without looking at it and approached the iron bedstead. On the stand alongside was a coal-oil lamp with a bright pink shade, some ancient peace offering of Joe's. The patient lay beyond the circle of light, in the blue shadows.

She was very thin and wasted, but her eyes were abnormally bright, and there was a strange, feverish precocity about the upturned nose and a misplaced look of eagerness on her face. Although she lay weak and still, she seemed in a perpetual movement, and at sight of him her lips opened in an ecstatic smile. All he could see was that smile, which maddened and saddened him and made him want to hurt her even now. Yet when he spoke his voice was very gentle:

"How are you, Lily?"

He felt her pulse, placed his cool palm a moment on her forehead, then arranged her arms more comfortably, and turning to the nurse, signed with his hand that there was nothing more he could do. . . . He walked to the window and raised the sash, which she had lifted a little way, as high as it would go. A draught of damp air came in and brought to his ears the cottony sound of falling snow. The pond was all but invisible, limited at one end by the crazy-scattered limbs of scrubwillows, rising like giant witches' brooms, and at the other by the shadowy outlines of the ice-house.

A thought was struggling in his mind, but he could not hold it. He could feel it, however, in successive waves: a tremendous affront to him, to everybody who held life in esteem.

The sound of guns brought him back to himself, and then he heard the quick, scared call of ducks. Some one was hunting; he wondered who. It was almost completely dark; they would never find the birds, even if they got them. It worried him. And then he wished he were out there, too, in warm high boots, lying in the snow behind a blind of cornstalks, the firm feel of a gun in his hands.

He pulled the window halfway down and started to leave. Mrs. Thorpe cut across to meet him, always on tiptoe, always with her swinging gait. There was something hard and metallic about her bronze hair and sharp features and starched uniform. She awaited him with her hand on the door.

"How long will it be, Moon?"

"Moon, Moon," he thought. What a brittle cat she was!

"How do I know?" he demanded. And then curtly, "A couple of hours, maybe four."

Mrs. Thorpe nodded, looked speculatively down at the floor and made a little clucking sound.

He stared at her, then brushed his arm vaguely across his face. She looked so pleased. She was like impersonal nature, which seems to enjoy the manifestation of its phenomena. The expression on her face was just the same as that which he felt in the sun, the trees, the sky line, whenever he left a bed of death.

At the foot of the stairs he saw the son turn from the window, saw him because of the faint blue light which appeared as he moved away. At the same time he felt across the room the full impress of his cheerful bulk on the air.

"Pardon me, Doc, I want to ask you something. Will it be all right to take Joe out for a walk? Just for a little while? He hasn't budged since I come. He's in an awful state."

The son seemed determined to make the best of things. His manner and his personality irritated Dr. Moon. Besides, he could hear Joe milling in a chair behind him, and his stomach was revolted by the cold, stale smell of the house—a sickening eggshell odor. He longed to get out, but forced himself to be courteous. He went to great lengths.

"It will be all right," he said, "if you don't stay too long and keep in touch with the house. Nothing will happen right away. It never does." He straightened, and put an arm in his overcoat. "You see, these shocks never come close together, even at the last. A crisis arrives because the heart can't pump blood through the arteries. The condition is accompanied by spasms of pain—your mother has been suffering the past week. We do what we can to ease her with narcotics . . . morphine. Then the condition clears . . . the heart triumphs, so to speak . . . and things go along for a while. Always for a while."

"I see," the son said. "I see."

Dr. Moon turned toward the table, touching his hat to the obscurity.

"Good-bye, Joe!"

"Good-bye, Doc. Oh, Doc, good-bye!"

He closed the door. A slight draught blew curling flakes about his trousers' legs; his feet sounded hollow on the porch. He slushed through the snow, already melting on the sidewalk, clinging to his steps, making his feet seem heavy. The smell of the house, the sound of the son's voice, the picture of his patient in that upstairs room, were still with him; he could not shake them off. Lily was going to die; she was going to die as she had lived, deluded. And the snow was falling endlessly, foreshortening the darkness, covering the earth and the houses, imprisoning him with his thoughts.

At the corner of the square he hesitated, standing with his hands in his pockets, his shoulders hunched under the smothering shower. It was completely night, a blackness thickened with grey. The other side of the feebly lighted square looked like the edge of civilization.

Beyond, it seemed there could be nothing human, only a limitless waste of falling snow.

Such a wave of hopelessness came over him that he could not think of going home, and he turned toward the speakeasy. He wanted to get drunk, drunker than he had ever been in his life, drunker than he had ever dreamed of being, so drunk that he would be beyond all thought or feeling.

The speakeasy, a former grocery store in which a full bar equipment had been installed, was packed with men. He edged up to a vacant place halfway down the long rail, and ordered a rye, tossing it off at a swallow. Then he ordered another one.

He faced the entrance, lifting his glass, and as he did so the door opened and old Joe appeared, pushed in by his son.

The glass was at his lips; he drank the whisky and turned to the bar again, watching the approach of father and son in the mirror. They were quite close before they saw him. The son greeted him heartily and passed on, but Joe started, then sank his head more deeply into his shoulders.

"You here, too, Doc?" he asked, huskily.

Dr. Moon did not speak; he only nodded, and faced the mirror again, fingering his glass. He watched in amazement while Joe sat down at a table and the son brought sandwiches, bologna, and beer. He felt bewildered, a little hurt, as if they had done him some wrong; and then suddenly, in keeping with his state of mind, with the weather, with everything that had gone before, an intuition came to him.

He was positive the son knew nothing of Joe's promise to reform, because Joe lacked the strength to tell him. Now that they were here, it was easy to see what would happen. They would both get drunk and go stumbling home, where Lily was dying in the belief that Joe would never drink again.

It all came to him in a flash, and he was sure, absolutely sure, that he had guessed the truth. It was just such a thing as would happen to the Masheks, as would happen to him, on such a night, feeling as he did.

His conscience bothered him, urging him to interfere, but he pushed it down violently. It was none of his affair.

Everything occurred as he had foreseen. Soon after they had finished eating, the son came to the bar for two whiskies. A little later he returned for two more.

Dr. Moon gripped the rail tightly and ordered another one himself.

There was no question now that he was right, that he had been right all along in his shame of humanity. Humanity! The blood rushed to his brain and he saw a whole world of foolish Lilies and weak Joes and blundering sons, a world which filled him with disgust.

He wanted to laugh; he wanted to do more than laugh. And then he had an amusing idea, the idea of joining them, to see what would happen.

Taking his glass in his hand, he walked as steadily as he could down the center of the room and stood at the side of their table.

Old Joe started to get up deferentially, but Dr. Moon waved him back to his seat.

"I thought I'd come," he said, with a bow, "and join the performance. Since we're all here together."

"Good for you, Doc," the son said. "Sit down and have a drink and listen to what I been saying to Joe. I know you'll agree with me absolutely. We're both in the same boat, I told him. I know it hits him hardest, I don't deny that, but there's only one thing to do. No matter who we are we got to take these things as they come. Ain't I right, Doc?"

Dr. Moon nodded his head gravely. "I'm coming to believe so," he said. "I do agree with you, absolutely. It's a mistake to take things too hard."

Joe looked at him, unimpressed. Slowly he shook his head. "I been a bad man, Doc. I been a drunken, good-for-nothing, son of a bitch. But I'm goin' to reform. Doc don't believe me; he knows something, Doc does. But I'm goin' to. Wait and see. You think so, Doc? Listen, Doc. There's things I got to do. I got to have a Mass said, and a monument. . . ."

"You can't do that," the son interrupted. "I wish you'd explain to him, Doc. Ma's a Baptist. You can't have no Mass said for a Baptist."

"Although I'm not a Catholic," said Dr. Moon, "I'll tell you this: The Catholic Church is a great church." He put out his hands, explanatory. "Catholic—universal. Universal—Catholic. I'm not familiar with the laws of the Church, but I'm sure that it's possible. You go ahead, Joe, and do what you want." He turned to the son. "Joe will do what he wants."

"He sure will," the son said, "and I'll help him. Don't you ever doubt that. You ask him what the first thing I said to him was. 'I was a mean kid,' I said, 'and I want to make up for it now. Anything in the world I can do, let me know. And,' I said, 'take it from me I didn't come broke.' Don't you worry about the monument, Joe."

"As for the stone," began Dr. Moon, and paused—"I wonder . . . I'd like. . . ." He hesitated again, while Joe looked at him with a wavering glance. "Lily. All these years. You know what I'm trying to say. . . . I never sent you a bill in my life, Joe. If you'd let me help a little now. . . ."

Joe began suddenly to weep. His little red, watery eyes looked like broken blisters. "You too, Doc," he said. "You like Lily. She's so good, and me . . . do you know what I am, Doc? I'm . . ."

Dr. Moon put his hand on Joe's shoulder, which collapsed under his touch. "Yes, I know, Joe, but don't worry now. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters. We're no good. Nobody's any good. Hell! Look, Joe"—he brought his hand back and put it at his side, as if expecting to find something wrong. "Some day, Joe, you and I . . ."

"Sure, we all got it coming to us," the son said.

"Let's have another drink." He got up and went to the bar.

Dr. Moon watched his retreating back, and then said, confidentially: "These young fellows, Joe, they don't understand as we do. Every time the sun sets it's one less for us, and we wonder why it should be that way when we know what's at the end—nothing. I beg your pardon, Joe, I know you don't believe that, but . . . nothing."

He waited for the son to return, and went on: "You're right; we all have it coming to us. That's just the point I want to make. We've got to remember that every day. Here we are, you and Joe and I. We've got to live. We can't die without living. We've got to be conscious, be human, live strenuously, live beautifully. Live. We've got to mean something. There is a saying" (he waited to fix their attention): " 'Be noble, and the nobleness of other men . . . sleeping but not dead . . . will rise in majesty, to meet thine own.' "

" 'Will rise in majesty to meet thine own,' " the son repeated. "That's beautiful, Doc. That's swell."

"Lily," Joe called, "she's like what you say, ain't she, Doc?"

At this Dr. Moon suddenly came to himself and did not say anymore. He remembered his idea and grew very reserved, nodding his head and drinking in silence while both Joe and the son talked at once.

The talking stopped, and all three grew aware that the bartender was standing before them.

"Somebody telephoned from your house," he said to Joe. "They want you to come home."

The two Masheks looked with scared glances at Dr. Moon, and then at one another.

"Come," the doctor said. "We'd better hurry."

He pulled Joe up from the chair, and the son helped with the overcoat. They left by the rear door, which opened on an alley, and followed it to the street. They walked one on each side of Joe, pulling him along, holding him up when he wanted to drop to his knees and pray. The weather had grown colder; ice had formed under the deepening layer of snow. It was difficult going. A wind blew small hard flakes across their faces.

Dr. Moon felt intensely curious, but calm. Several times his conscience intruded, but he ignored it. He was only a spectator. He only wanted to see what would happen.

The son leaned over Joe's back and whispered, "Do you think we'll be too late, Doc?"

"No, I don't think so," Dr. Moon answered. "Not if we hurry."

He was the first to enter the house. A lamp had been placed below, by the light of which he saw the nurse looking down from the top of the stairs. He took off his wraps and mounted, followed by Joe and the son. His step was steady; he felt perfectly sober. He walked across the sickroom to the little corner washstand and scrubbed his hands and dried them skilfully on a towel. It was all mechanical, almost unconscious. Then he turned to his patient.

Her eyes stared at the ceiling; her lips moved; her hands crawled back and forth over the covers.

"What is it, Lily?" he asked, and motioned to the nurse to find out what she was saying.

"She wants you to come close," Mrs. Thorpe told Joe and the son.

They fell awkwardly over the bed and she stared at them, and then smiled in exaltation. Dr. Moon saw the smile, and the troubled but unbroken rhythm of her lips as she prayed. Then he turned away.

He had known at once that she could not see them, that she could only realize their presence. She was dying deluded, after all.

He walked to the window and watched the white flakes whirl in from the blackness and click against the pane. Behind him he heard Lily's dry, persistent whispering, and an occasional moan from Joe.

So now he knew for sure there was no sense in anything.

He turned around. "I'm going, Joe. I'm going. Good-bye."

He walked quickly from the room, signaling for the nurse to follow him, closing the door behind them. For a second he stared at her, then brushed his hand across his face. Already he felt tired again.

"Do you want to do something for me? Two things. Go downstairs and cook them something hot. Some coffee. And the second thing, stay out of there."

She stood still, making no answer, watching him in amazement. At the top of the stairs he turned and looked over his shoulder. "Whatever you do," he added, "don't you touch her."

He descended with eyes looking straight ahead, put on his coat, his cap, his gloves, marched out of the house, across the yard, down the street, through the snow. It was getting bitter; he turned up the collar of his coat and sank his hands deep in the pockets. He tried not to think; above everything else, he tried not to think of what he had done.

Tomorrow, he told himself, would be another day. He would be all right tomorrow.

O PIONEERS!

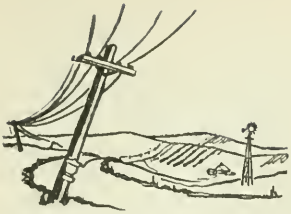
John Peale Bishop

The white sagebrush desert. Noon.
All day heat. But the nights cool. And
Again yellowing dawn. Aspens on
Mountains and yellow sagebrush on sand.

Blind light bewilders. Blown or trampled out,
You cannot follow in the apparent wind
Your father's footsteps. It is to this end
They would have led you. Turn and turn about

The way is lost to fortune. Forward, back,
Delirium will never find a stream
Running gold sand. Rather earth will crack
Dry on skeletons, skulls in some daft scheme,

Sockets of eyes that perished crazily,
Ignorant of the sun, the sagebrush, mad
Even to the dew. A continent they had
To ravage and raving romped from sea to sea.



Buffalo in the Judith Basin: 1883

Pat T. Tucker

IN mid-winter of 1883 myself and several cowboys, including Charles M. Russell, famous as the "Cowboy Artist," camped on the Judith River. Those of you who have visited Montana will recall the Judith River valley, located in a huge basin about eighty-five miles across and about the same in length, the Missouri River skirting the northern boundary, the Moccasin and the Snowy mountains on the east, the Belt mountains on the south, and the Highwoods on the west. The buffalo that roamed those hills came in from their different summer ranges and wintered on the long bunch grass that grew in the Judith Basin. There was always plenty of open water and good shelter in these foothills.

Our daily work was to pair off and trail through the foothills and bad lands of the Missouri River, to look after the range cattle, as the Indians and rustlers were at work on this range. Whenever a suspicious-looking trail or sign showed that an Indian rustler had been killing or stealing cattle, our orders were to report to the camps immediately. Then a larger force of cowboys would hit the trail to run down the offender.

One day in January Frank Davis, my old side-kick, and I were out trailing through the foothills. We struck Sage Creek, one of the tributaries of the Judith River. Trailing up this creek we came into deeper snow, it striking just above our horses' knees. While passing through some jack pines we chanced upon a track, which upon a second look proved to be a buffalo trail. Seeking to affirm this, and likewise to see if buffalo were still left in these parts, we took up the trail, riding very carefully through the deep snow. The depth of the snow muffled all sounds of our horses' feet on the dead branches underneath. Our fear of being discovered, however, was very great, as the snow still lay on the branches of the pines where a slight jar brought down a shower of snow. To overcome this we dismounted and proceeded on foot. As we had the wind in our favor no danger came from this source. We finally came within sight of the buffalo. They were on the edge of the tall timber, lying down. As we looked at them we thought of the possibilities of fresh buffalo meat for camp as well as ready cash for hides. We feared we could not handle the whole herd of fourteen, as our only arms were six-guns.

Returning to the cow camp we changed horses and picked our mounts with care. These particular horses had been on buffalo hunts before and could be ridden up close without showing fear. After cleaning our Winchester carbines we rode out to the place where the buffs had been.

They were gone, to our despair, but we quickly trailed them to a small blind canyon, which was the source of their water supply. This box canyon had an opening about fourteen feet wide. The whole distance around was a wall of granite rock, about three hundred feet high. At the other end, though, it was only about thirty feet high, and tapered to the top. Water had at some time formed this natural death-trap for the buffalo.

As we rode up to the mouth of the canyon we could see the buffalo about three-quarters of a mile away and quite close to the rock wall at the other end. They had seen us and were trying to climb up the wall where it was lowest.

Our plans were made at once. I was to leave my horse at the entrance of the canyon. Frank would stay there also and kill any buffalo that escaped me, as I was to sneak up within shooting distance and get what I could; so I left him there and proceeded on, bending low and keeping behind the rocks, willows, sagebrush and other objects that would hide me from their sight.

Frank, meanwhile, kept in view and tried to attract their attention, which I believe he did, as the buffalo appeared unaware of my presence behind the large granite rocks. My Winchester rifle was of the very latest model and held eight cartridges in the magazine and one in the barrel. Smokeless powder was still to be discovered, and whenever a shot was fired a small cloud of blue smoke appeared. At the first crack of the rifle I dropped the leader of the herd, a magnificent creature that had done well to preserve this last remnant of a once countless herd.

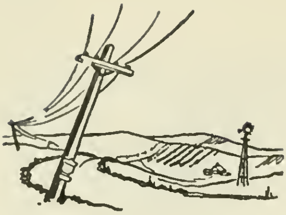
This only increased their efforts to climb up the wall, or to mill around. As they continued to do this, I was successful in dropping six more of their number. They then split into two bunches and bolted for the mouth of the canyon. One bunch of three went off in a direction away from the rock behind which I was hiding. The other bunch of five came almost directly toward me. So I dropped two before they ran back to their former place. The three that had bolted for the entrance were killed by Frank before they could get out into the more open country. The others tried again to climb up the almost perpendicular side of the canyon, only to fall back when they lost their foothold. In a very short time I had killed the last one as it made a final attempt to get away from my deadly fire.

After the smoke had cleared and the last buffalo had given a few dying gasps, I made my way from behind the rocks and went up to the dead buffalo. As I was looking them over, Frank rode up, leading my horse. We selected the choicest of the meat, which was a three-year-old heifer, cut off the two hindquarters, tied them on our saddles and rode for camp at high speed, reaching it just before supper.

Mike Ryan, the cook, was delighted on seeing the fresh buffalo meat. It meant a change for the rest of the boys, as well as ourselves, and it pleased them very much. The straight beef three times a day was not favored, and a change was always desired. Getting the meat into the shack and cutting it up into steaks was left to Frank and me.

Soon the hungry cowboys were enjoying a real feed on the choicest meat of the land. Mike Ryan, as a cook, was unequaled. Formerly he had cooked on Missouri River steamers, but cowmen traveling up and down the river to St. Louis, induced him to come and cook for their cowboys. It took a good cook to keep a bunch of cowboys satisfied during the long winter months.

After this sumptuous feed Frank and I saddled up fresh horses and rode down three-and-a-half miles to the stage line station. The station was run by E. J. Morrison, a typical New Englander. He owned the store and furnished supplies to cattlemen and prospectors, freighters, etc., and through him we found a place to sell our buff meat. He agreed to purchase twelve of the buffalo at four cents per pound and get them from where we had killed them. This was not much for him to do, as he had ox teams and sleds. He had the buffalo dragged over the snow to where the sleds were left and loaded them on.



A Rural Community

Ruth Suckow

THE station agent at Walnut, and Mrs. Jake Dietz who was expecting her brother's wife from Pomeroy, could not place the man who got off the "Clipper" at 10:10. He did not look just like a traveling man. He was stocky, moved very briskly, had a slight mustache, wore a grey suit and a traveling cap, and carried a bag pasted over with labels which Mrs. Dietz could not make out. She did not hear him ask the station agent where Luke Hockaday lived, or it would have come to her who he must be—that Ralph Chapin whom Luke Hockaday had "raised" and who was now a writer of some kind. But she was busy greeting her brother's wife and saying "Well, you *got* here."

Ralph Chapin looked alertly about him, at the yellow-and-brown depot with the row of willow trees and the pastures beyond, at the one small business street and the dingy brick Opera House and Masonic Hall. He thought, "*That* was here—*that* wasn't." The sharp white steeple of the little old Congregational church where he had suffered every Sunday through one of Mr. Soper's half-hour prayers, no longer rose from the maple trees beyond the Opera House. It had burned, he remembered, and now there was a modern building of pressed brick with a square English tower. He noticed that the little street "across the tracks," where the old hotel and livery barn stood, was falling into decay. One old man sat out in a Windsor chair in front of the empty livery stable. Two or three automobiles passed. They were putting up two new "pebble dash" bungalows on what used to be a vacant lot filled with red clover. Changes—even here! You couldn't escape them.

The station agent had told him that Luke Hockaday's was just at the edge of town. "Well, you know where the old Wood place is? Well, d'you know where Art Penhollow's pasture is—where the dump is? Well, d'you know where the *cemetery* is? Well, right across from that where the road turns." He thought that he could find it. This was the first time that he had been in Walnut since Luke Hockaday had moved into town; it must be fifteen years or more.

He went along a street that had a sidewalk only part of the way. It was "across the tracks" in the old part of town. The first thing that he had noticed when the train pulled out was the stillness everywhere—only twitterings of birds and an occasional trill of song from a fence or tree. His mind, still filled with the rumblings and shriekings of cities, could hardly take it in. Was everyone asleep? As he looked down the street, it pleased him to fancy that the whole town had fallen asleep, like the Sleeping Beauty's castle, and was waiting for him to come back to waken it. Because this street had scarcely changed at all. It was almost the same!

He had been prepared for change. Flying about all over the civilized world as he did, change was the only thing he saw. His mind was full of a world rocking and falling and transforming itself into something undreamed of before—of new inventions, changing empires, a tottering social order, revolution. He had expected hardly to recognize the little old town. When he had come through Edinburgh, the county seat, where he and the Hockaday boys used to drive with their girls on County Fair day and the Fourth of July, he had seen it transformed from a country town into a miniature modern city. His eye had noticed at once the fine brick bank, the asphalt, the new cement bridge over the river. What he had not been prepared for was to find anything the same. He had not permitted himself to expect it. But of course Walnut was slow. It was a country community, made up almost wholly of retired farmers, and they either of English birth or English descent. It had always had something quaint and rustic about it. Besides, all hill and timber countries were behind the times; and Walnut was just at the edge of that patch of rocky wooded country in the northeastern corner of Iowa.

He looked from side to side—eager to recognize old landmarks, half-amused when he discovered them, yet feeling all the time a tinge of sadness that was like the haunting of melancholy in this exquisite autumn day. This was the very street along which they used to drive when they came into town with a load or on Saturday nights. A wagon came along now—rattling slowly, an old man with a thick white beard hunched over on the seat, a bushel basket of apples and some gunny sacks full of nuts jolting about in the back. That—everything he saw—teased him with elusive memories. This old house had always stood here—a one-story house of dingy brick, plain, with square small-paned windows, an old-timer. That big oak tree at the corner! Here were vague reminders of the old days—plain white houses with almost a New England air, fallen leaves half-raked upon the lawns, some late petunias bordering white house walls, a rockery, a bed of pansies and withered "sweet alyssum" edged with white clam shells from the Mississippi. Rope swings hanging from the boughs of elm trees, a boy with bare feet who stared after him, pumps with tin cups dangling, even one of those queer old hammocks made of slats! It was like going back into his past, in a kind of dream. There were memories that he could almost touch—but not quite. . . .

He looked beyond the houses, at the line of low hills on the south. He stood still—almost caught his breath at the sudden stab of emotion. With a strange impulse he took off his cap, held it crushed in his hand. There they were still—the old eternal hills! How well he knew them, better than anything in the world. The lay of the land—something in that to stir the deepest feeling in a man. Low rolling hills, fold after fold, smooth brown and autumnal, some plowed to soft earth-color, some set with cornstalks of pale tarnished gold. Along the farther ones, the woods lay like a colored cloud, brown, russet, red, and purple-tinged. As he walked on, the houses grew fewer; everything dwindled into pasture land. The feeling of autumn grew more poignant. There was a scent of dust in the stubble. The trees grew in scattered russet groups. One slender young cottonwood, yellow as a goldfinch and as lyric in its quality, stood in a meadow, alone. Not even spring beauty was so aching and so transient—like music fading away. Yet under everything something abiding and eternal.

He came to the very edge of town, almost to the woods through which Honey Creek ran. A house stood at the turn of the road. Of all things he had seen, it was the most autumnal. It stood plain and white against the depths of blue sky. Its trees were turning to pale yellow, its yard scattered with dry leaves. On the back porch yellow seed corn hung by the bleached husks to dry. Hickory nuts and walnuts were spread out on a piece of rag carpet. On the fence posts, orange pumpkins were set in blue granite kettles to ripen. The corn in the small field was in the shock. The smell of apples came from somewhere.

"This must be where they live!" He was sure of it, would have known it if he had not seen the dump across the road in the hollow, if he had not caught sight of the black wrought-iron fence of the cemetery and the white tombstones among the somber evergreens.

He went up to it, past the shed and a chicken house, to the side gate. He walked quickly, with a smile of anticipation in his eyes and ready to come out upon his lips. An old man was just coming out of the barn along the two planks to the back door. He was big but crippled with rheumatism. He wore a blue shirt, a vest with a brown sateen back, and grey woolen socks. He had a handsome old face that must have been romantic in its youth, with a wave of snow-white hair, a high color, a big white mustache and small brown eyes. He regarded the stranger with the wariness of a countryman. It was Luke Hockaday.

"Well, Father—good day to you!" Ralph Chapin called. His teeth glittered under his small light mustache. He held out his hand.

The old man took it doubtfully.

"Don't you know me? Don't you know Ralph?"

Luke Hockaday leaned forward and stared at him. "Well, I believe it is! It's Ralph, for a fact. Ma, come here!"

An old woman came to the door whom, in spite of all the years' changes, Ralph Chapin knew for the woman he had called Mother. "Who's this, Ma?" the old man said. She looked at one and then the other, as if she feared some kind of trap. Recognition began to dawn slowly in her face as the man kept on smiling at her. "It's Ralph! Sure it is!" They all laughed exultantly. She held out her arms. He came into them and stood there a long moment patting her stooped back and trying to swallow down any tears before they should come up and dim his eyes.

He had never dreamed that he would be so moved—or that they still cared so much after all these years. He knew that this would be one of those moments that would always stay with him—with these two old people here, the white house and the blue sky, the light autumn rustling of the trees, the scent of dust and apples.

They went into the house, all talking. Luke carried Ralph's bag into the bedroom and the old lady took his cap from him and laid it carefully upon the white bedspread. All the time, Ralph was telling them in his rapid, easy, practiced way, in his slightly harsh but attractive voice the circumstances of his coming, and they were repeating and explaining what he said to each other. "Why, yes, didn't ye hear what he just got done saying, Ma?" "That's just what he's been trying to tell you, Pa, if you'd ever listen." But as he kept glancing about with his swift trained observation, he was feeling a sense of disappointment.

It was strange, wrong somehow, to have them here. After all, nothing remained the same in this world, in spite of the deep familiarity of those hills. They ought to have been in the parlor of the old farmhouse that he remembered so well. It was one of those rock houses that are still found here and there near the Mississippi. It had deep windows, a wainscoting painted light brown, and beside the door a cupboard like the wainscoting. Whenever he thought of it, he could see Mother Hockaday opening that cupboard where she kept her glasses, toothpicks, her few letters, and a striped paper bag of cinnamon sticks in a tall glass. And he could fancy himself—he must have done it some time—standing in the yard where some yellow snapdragons sent from England had run wild, in the sunshine, looking at the deep woods across the road.

He sat back smiling at the two old people while they went over and over the circumstances of the meeting. "Why, I didn't know no more who 'twas when I see him opening that gate," Father Hockaday said. "Says he—'Good day to ye, Father.' Well, I knew 'twasn't any of the boys, but I couldn't figure out who't could be, then. Then says he—'Don't ye know Ralph?' Ralph—well, I see that's who 'twas." "I knew him right off. Sure I did," the old lady declared. "No, Ma. You didn't know him no more'n I did." "Sure I did." Ralph laughed delightedly. Suddenly he recognized their old familiar ways of speech and he was at home again. Mother Hockaday's reassuring "Sure," and old Luke so slow, so deliberate, with a flavor of rural England in his tone. It was the way that he remembered old Grandma and Grandpa Hockaday talking, except that they had been completely English. In its different way it struck a note of memory as deep as that which the sight of the hills had touched—but homely, intimate, that brought a smile to his lips. Again it moved him, and astonished him.

"Why, do I look so much the same, Mother?" he asked rallyingly. He did not think that he did.

"Sure you do," she replied. "Oh, you dress different and talk different and got that little *mustache,* but then your voice is just the same, and the way you look out of your eyes—I'd know ye anywhere. That quick way, taking a body right up on everything. The rest of the boys was always more slow, like Pa and me. Sure."

He laughed, but he was not exactly pleased. He thought himself entirely transformed from that little raw country boy. He had studied, worked, traveled. He had thought there was not a trace of his old self left. He had been feeling all the time how remote he was from them, what a long way he had come. He had been an orphan whom Luke and Sarah Hockaday had "taken to raise." They were the only parents he had ever known. They had been kind to him, but they had boys and girls of their own and he had always remembered that after all he was not one of theirs. That was partly what had sent him out into the world while the rest had stayed close to the old home, that and his eager restless temperament. He had lived with them on the farm until he was sixteen, when he had gone to work his way through a little Methodist academy a few stations away at Wesley, and then through the State University. Then he had gone into newspaper work in Chicago, and just once, at the time of Jack Hockaday's wedding, he had come back to the farm. He always wrote to the two old people on Christmas Day and sent them a check. Now he was a writer, doing special articles for the big dailies and the magazines. He had been to half the cities of the globe, was in touch with all that was going on in the world, with every "movement." He was just back from a flying trip to the capitals of the new Middle-European states where he had interviewed the leaders of numberless political factions. Before that he had investigated the steel question, and before that had been a special correspondent at the war and the Peace Conference. He was going on now to do an article for *Hunter's* on "Our New South." His life was a series of flashing journeys, a kind of animated weekly. He thought of himself as a man without a home, or rather as a man capable of making a home in any café where he might chance to find a cozy seat. But somehow, after being so long in far-off countries, through such dangers, and after an illness that he had had in Prague, something had urged him to see this little town again and the two old people whom he had always called Mother and Father. A sudden realization had come that they would not be here forever. He had come on from Chicago before he went South. It was not far. He might have come long ago.

But now as he said, "Now, Mother, sit back and let *me* take a look at *you,*" he could see that she was not so different, after all. At once she began to look familiar to him. She had not changed so much as simply aged. That small head of hers, with something peculiarly sweet even in the cut of the features and structure of the bones, with the eyes set in deep hollows, and the hair of yellowed silver parted in the middle and rippling across the low square forehead. Only, the face was wrinkled, and the loss of teeth had spoiled the sweet curves of the thin lips, had brought up the little chin and sunk in the mouth. But most certainly, still Mother Hockaday, and the Sarah Wood whose picture, with curls and a feather, he and May used to admire so in the old album.

She looked at him timidly. "I'm an old woman, Ralph." She had always been proud of her pretty face.

"Pshaw, Mother, not so old. Still that same pretty curly hair."

"Oh, but just see how white it is, Ralph. Not so white as Pa's is, though, even now."

"No, but I got teeth. Ma's lost hers."

"Yes, and losing teeth ages a body awful. Oh, we're both getting old, Pa and me. But then it's natural for folks to get old. They all have to. Sure they do."

"We all follow the same path. The path of life," the old man said impressively.

Ralph stirred slightly. His brows arched a little. He wondered if Luke was still such a devout old codger, and smiled to himself.

But the conversation did not become emotional, after all, as he had half comically feared, remembering Luke's way. Luke Hockaday was a combination of close canny farmer, generous neighbor, and devout churchman, absorbed in his family relations, of an almost profound simplicity. He loved to talk over the ways of God and the lives of his children. His small brown eyes would moisten. But now the old lady gave him no chance. She made little signs to him, to which he answered—"What ye want, anyway, Ma?"—and finally she contrived to let him know that he was to kill a chicken and to go to town for her. He put on his wide-brimmed black felt hat, and Ralph, smiling to himself, watched him go hobbling off obediently, staring at the piece of yellow paper on which was written all the things which he was to buy in town and half of which he would come back without, even so. They were going to kill the fatted calf.

"Well now, Ralph, I'll leave ye to yourself a bit," Mother Hockaday said a little formally. "But just make yourself at home. You *are* at home. Sure you are!"

She was going out to the kitchen. "But can't I come out with you, Mother?" he asked lightly. "Tie an apron on me and set me to work. It isn't every day you have a big boy to run errands for you."

She looked horrified. He remembered now that no male Hockaday had ever invaded the kitchen except to fill the wood box and empty the slops. That was the English of it. "Oh, no, my dear. I wouldn't have you coming out there to work. I'm used to gettin' the meals, you know. Sit down and read, or walk around the place. *You* know what ye likes to do best. I'll just get us a little something to eat. 'Twon't be much, nor in any style like ye gets it in the cities—"

"No, I'm sure it *won't* be as I get it in the cities," he interrupted. "Not if Father carries out his designs on that chicken."

"We ain't got many good fries now," she said apologetically. "Pa, he thought the chickens was too much for me. Addie—that's Jack's wife—has got a hundred and fifty young fries, think of that, Ralph! My, it's nice when they all comes out clucking around you when ye goes out with the feed! I likes chickens. I misses what I had on the farm. . . . Make yourself at home, now, Ralph. If there's anything ye'd like and ye don't see, *ask* me for it. Sure. That's what ye want to do."

She went into the kitchen and he looked after her, smiling fondly.

Left to himself, he wandered softly about a little at first, as one does in a strange house, touching this and that, glancing at the pictures and at the plants in the front window. Then he sat down by the table and picked up a paper that lay there. The *Home Friend!* He threw back his head and laughed noiselessly. To think they were still taking that—a ridiculous old sheet with farm items and blood-and-thunder serials that they had subscribed for, God knows why, as long as he could remember. He could see Mother Hockaday putting on her glasses, sitting down by the lamp on the dining-room table, while the June bugs beat against the ceiling, and saying, "Now, Jack (or May, or Dollie, or Eddie), can't ye go away awhile and quit pestering and let Ma read the *Home Friend?*" And they never could. He did not believe the poor woman had ever yet finished a serial! He looked down on the lower shelf for more plunder. The stereoscope! Verily, it was. With the very same views—Westminster Abbey, Mont Blanc, Unter den Linden, the Paris Opera House, the Arnold Arboretum, Forest Hills, Massachusetts, with the azaleas tinted a hideous pink and the leaves a ghastly green. The old album, too, with the dark leather covers stamped with gold. But he was too restless to look at that now, at all the pictures of Hockadays and Woods and "brother's wife's folks" and "cousins in York state." He wandered about noiselessly on an exploring expedition into the past, everything bringing up memories, acutely familiar, homely, humorous, yet always with that little ache of sadness. The combination desk and bookcase (a new acquisition, evidently, when they had moved into town), but on every shelf a doily, and on the doilies Mother Hockaday's treasures—colored sand in a glass arranged in the form of a wreath of flowers from the "Picture Rocks" by the Mississippi, a blue plate and teapot from England, a pink shell, some grey Spanish moss the Ed Woods had sent up from Florida, an agate—Oh, all those things! And on top of the bookcase the stuffed owl that Uncle Pete Hockaday had shot in the timber. A photograph, of the year 1902, pasted on a grey card—a family reunion at the farm. He could make most of them out in the group standing awkwardly in front of the old rock house—Mother, Father, May and Dollie in those hideous collars and berthas and crimps, Jack, Ed, Will, and their wives, numerous children held firmly in front of parents, Uncle Ben Hockaday in his suspenders. And there were other pictures—Grandpa and Grandma Hockaday framed in black walnut, Dollie at four with bangs and fair hanging hair and striped stockings, Jack's and Addie's wedding picture, Ed's and Girlie's wedding picture (Ed had curled his mustache on the curling-iron!), Dollie's and Fred's wedding picture, Dollie in her "graduation dress" holding a rolled diploma, the class of 1898, "Walnut H. S.," grandchildren, their graduating and wedding pictures—If time didn't fly! And yet what a tremendous sense of continuation—that first old couple, and a child, and then another couple and another child, and another couple and another child, and another couple—nothing new, after all, but endless, slightly varied, repetitions. The same baby features appeared over and over again. He was completely absorbed when Mother Hockaday called to him from the door, "Ralph, would ye like to wash your hands before we set down?"

He jumped.

"What ye found there? Oh, photographs!" And as he stood smiling, blinking a little as if he had come out of a dream, she went on gravely to point out and explain each one—"That's Dollie's and Fred's girl Bernadine. I guess ye never seen her. That's Uncle Ben Hockaday's son's wife's sister, she's married now. That's May's youngest boy"—until Father Hockaday called out, "Ma, are ye goin' to let all the vittles get cold?"

He followed her out to the dining room. As they sat down he noted the large window full of plants, and saw that although the table and chairs were not those they had used on the farm, he remembered many of the dishes and the starched white company tablecloth. He remembered that awkward moment when they first sat down and did not know whether to start eating or to bow their heads, until Father Hockaday began in his slow devout voice—"Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for all these Thy manifold good gifts to us" and he ducked his head hastily and looked as if he had expected it; and the awkward moment again after the blessing was over, and they all sat there, just before someone started passing things. And he knew the food! The platter of fried chicken, the mashed potatoes with the butter making a little golden hollow, the awkward bowl of gravy, the big slices of good homemade Iowa bread, the cucumber pickles, sweet pickles, beet pickles, red jelly, honey, corn relish, in a succession of little glass dishes that kept him so busy passing he hardly knew when to eat. "Now, there ain't much, Ralph, but what there is you're dearly welcome to." "Help yourself, Ralph. Make out a meal." "We're plain, Ma and me. *You* know that. But I guess we can manage to get ye fed." "Take it all, Ralph; there's more in the kitchen." Of course the table should have been surrounded by children. Still, the feeling was the same. Cool autumn sunshine came in through the window across the red glass pickle dish, and there was a faint odor from the plants.

"If I'd just known ye's coming, I'd sent out for some of the children to come in," Mother Hockaday said. "May, she's got some of Hank's folks there right now, but Dollie, she might have come in, and Jack, and Eddie. Why didn't we telephone 'em, Pa?"

"Oh, but, Mother," Ralph said hastily, "I wouldn't have you go to so much work."

"Oh, I'm used to cooking for a big raft of folks. Sure I am," she said easily. "I can still get up a meal for 'em if I am getting old."

"Every Sunday we're together," Father Hockaday said. "Every Sunday I got my girls and boys about me as if we's still all living together on the farm. Children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren all together."

"Well, it's nice. It's a comfort for us. Sure it is. That's what I say. Help yourself to the pickles, Ralph. Maybe you'd like this kind better. . . . But what'd the children say if they knew Ralph was here, Pa?" she continued. "What'd Jack say, d'ye s'pose? Ralph, ye better call Jack up after dinner. See what he says!"

"I'll do that," Ralph answered heartily.

"What d'ye s'pose Jack'll say? What'd *May* say, Pa?"

She was still talking of that when they had all finished eating and she had come into the parlor after washing the dishes. She had brushed her rippling hair, and put on a thin dress of figured lawn with a ruffle around the bottom of the skirt, and a black ribbon about her waist. She stood listening delightedly while Ralph rang four long and a short for Jack on the old-fashioned telephone.

"Hello! Jack Hockaday speaking?—Know who this is, Jack? You *don't!*—Well, do you remember a certain brother of yours—Yes, it is. It most assuredly is. Ralph—yes." ("Bet he's surprised, ain't he?" Mother Hockaday cried gleefully.) "Wish I could, old fellow, but I'm here on a flying trip, you might say.—You *do* that. I'd like to see the other boys, too."

"Jack coming in?" Mother Hockaday asked delightedly.

"Yes, coming in tonight after milking."

"I knew he would. Sure, they all will. They'll all want to see Ralph."

Ralph was touched at the delight with which Jack had greeted him. And Jack and his wife were coming in, and were going to stop for Fred and Dollie, and send word to Ed and Will and May. Suddenly he found himself anxious to see them all. Why, he would have thought that the younger ones, like Ed and Dollie, would have half forgotten him by this time!

"You ought to make us a real visit, Ralph," Mother Hockaday said anxiously. "Jack'll want ye to go out there. See the old place. Jack's always thought so much of you. He still talks about what he and Ralph used to do."

He would have liked to see the old farm. He had supposed that to spend a few hours here, see the two old people once more, would have been enough for him. But he answered with regret, "Mother, I surely wish that I could." He went on to explain to her troubled uncomprehending eyes about an appointment in Louisville for Thursday, another in Birmingham. She did not see why he could not stay longer. He hardly saw why himself. "Well, I *wish* ye could stay," she repeated. "You know we're gettin' old, Pa and me."

Father Hockaday settled himself in his chair and took off his shoes again, now that the superficial strangeness of Ralph's clothes and manner had worn off. "So ye're a great traveler, Ralph," he began. "Ye been across the water and to foreign lands."

"Why, yes, Father!" Ralph gave him a flashing smile. "But what's that? You came over from England yourself. You've been a traveler. Mother, too."

"Yes," the old lady said vaguely. "Pa and Ma did. Me, too, only I was so little then. But I don't like to have ye so far away, Ralph. Now we're gettin' old, Pa and me, it's a comfort for us to have our children all living 'round us. Jack, he's on the old place, and Eddie where Uncle Abel Wood used to live. May, she's the farthest, out of Edinburgh. If you got to be in the city, why don't ye settle in Chicago, Ralph? That wouldn't be so bad. Then we could see ye often."

"Oh, I can't settle yet, Mother," he answered lightly. "Too many places to go. Too much to do."

"Not ready to settle, Ralph? Well, when ye goin' to be? You're over forty, ain't ye? Sure ye are."

"Oh, forty's young nowadays, Mother."

"Ye ought to settle, Ralph," Father Hockaday said. "It ain't right, the way you're living. It's often come to me, it ain't right. Here's all my boys, each one with his good wife and his home and his children growing up around him—only Ralph, now. And I often think, I wish ye could find a woman for ye, Ralph. Every man ought to have a helpmate. Look at Ma and me. What'd either of our lives been alone?"

"It's so lonesome for you, my dear," the old lady said commiseratingly.

The light smile with which Ralph had been listening at first had gradually become set and painful on his lips. He felt the sudden shock of a different point of view. He had been easily sure of the superiority of his life, but how could he hope to explain it to them? The moving with world events, the meeting with the choice of the earth, the advantages of freedom, the sharp spur of competition, the eager gnawing need of work, the place that he had won for himself? It seemed to be melting away from him. He was all at once conscious of a void in the very center of his being. It unsettled him. It made him feel as if he were swimming in thin air. It was hard for him to answer, to turn the talk aside.

Father Hockaday said slyly, "But it's too late for you to get your old girl, Ralph. Yes, while ye's away, another man stepped in. Oh, she's a lovely woman, Dora is. I couldn't have asked better than to have had ye marry Dora."

"Yes, but he can't have Dora, now, Pa," Mother Hockaday put in. "And she ain't just the kind he'd want anymore. Ralph'd want a more stylish kind of woman, like him." Ralph laughed. "Yes, you find ye one, Ralph," she persisted. "Ain't you met some woman you'd like in some of those places where ye been? Ye've been around enough."

"Perhaps I haven't found any who'd like me."

"Don't tell me that, my dear," she answered proudly. He patted her hand.

"He'd never find a better woman than Dora Cross," old Luke repeated. "A good mother, and a good church worker, and a good housekeeper. He ought never to have let her go."

"Yes, but, Pa, Ralph didn't want to settle here. He wanted to see the world a little."

"Well, now he's seen it, ain't he? Now it's time for him to settle and make a home for himself, like all men does."

Ralph did not reply. After a silence—"Dora Cross!" he exclaimed, half humorously. "I haven't thought of her for years. Whom'd she marry, Father?"

"Why, this Tom Stonecipher. Ain't ye ever heard?"

"Never!" He laughed softly.

"There's where ye lost a good woman, Ralph."

"I wish ye could see Dora, Ralph—"

"Oh, no, Mother! Spare me that." He held up his hand. There was where he *would* see changes, in his boyhood sweetheart. He much preferred to keep her as he saw her now, a round face and fair hair surrounded by a kind of mist.

Old Luke was still harping on the same subject. "Melie Penhollow's still single, Ralph. Ye might get her."

"Melie Penhollow! What'd Ralph want of *her?"*

"Oh, now, Melie ain't such a bad woman. If she didn't have that kind o' squint-like—"

"Of course she ain't a bad woman. Melie's a nice girl. But *Ralph* don't want no one like Melie."

"Grace Smith—she's a nice woman, now. I'd like to see Grace get a husband."

"You let Ralph pick out his own wife, Pa. He knows who he wants better'n you do, I guess."

"Well, why don't he do it, then?" the old man grumbled. "He's had time enough. I just thought I'd help him out a little."

"Thanks, Father! Of course you did." Ralph laughed, but he felt uncomfortable.

A wife, a home, and a child—these things continued under all the seeming revolution in the lives of men. Eagerness and striving after other things—and then a sense of emptiness, and back to the old things again. Even he himself. He might come back to them.

Mother Hockaday brought out an immense scrapbook in which, among long obituaries and accounts of weddings from the Walnut *Echo,* she finally found an ancient picture of Ralph, in a high collar and bow tie, from a newspaper, and even some of his articles which other people had discovered for her in magazines.

"Why, Mother, I didn't know you'd care for all these things!" he exclaimed.

She put her hand on his knee and looked at him. "Why, Ralph, didn't I bring ye up? Ain't you one of my boys? Sure you are."

He sat back smiling and scarcely trusting himself to speak. He felt, to his wonder, a kind of resurrection of his boyhood self.

He was soon talking again, in his rapid and vivid way, trying to give them some faint ghost of a notion of all the things that he had seen and done. They listened with ingenuous delight. Several times Mother Hockaday laid her hand on his knee and stopped him while she turned to the old man to exclaim, "Don't that sound like Ralph, now, Pa?"

"Does it?" Ralph asked, laughing a little. "Was I always such a talker, Mother?"

"You was always a fine talker," she said fondly. "Better'n any of the boys. He was, wasn't he, Pa?"

"He talked a little too much, Ma, when you'd set him at the churn." They all laughed. "And he was awful hard to keep quiet in church. While the minister was praying, he'd twist, and *he'd* wiggle, and then he'd get all the rest of the boys to wigglin', and then he'd sneeze—"

Ralph laughed hilariously, recognizing the picture. But the old lady would not laugh at him. "Well, they was awful long, Pa; Mr.

Soper's prayers always was. I don't really know that I blamed the boy. Mr. Soper was a good man and a lovely preacher, but his prayers was long, that I've always said."

"Mother always sticks up for her boys."

"Sure I do, Ralph; sure I do."

But while he talked, although it soothed some dissatisfaction of his to see that they were struck with naïve admiration at the ease with which he talked, and at the thought of his having seen so many places, he could see that they did not really take it in. To their minds, it was Will and Ed and Jack who had achieved success. They admired Ralph, and yet they could not understand—how he lived, why he had no family, just what he was doing anyhow. He tried to give them some idea of what was going on in the world. But although they would exclaim, "Yes, things are changing! Nothing ever stays the same in this world," they said it comfortably, like repeating some old axiom, not as if they really grasped it at all. Once the old man said, "Yes, they talk about changin' everything, changin' everything. All this new machinery and all. But far as I see, no one's yet found the way to make the corn grow any way but from first planting the seed, and then it gettin' watered by the rains and het by the sun, tosselin' out and bein' cut. And folks stays about the same." The old lady had always been the brighter of the two. Her eyes were a little troubled as she tried to comprehend it all. But what pleased both of them was when they could catch some phrase or gesture that reminded them of the boy Ralph. Then they would exclaim in delight, "Didn't that sound like Ralph? Didn't it now?" And they would go on to relate, minutely, characteristics of his that he would have supposed no human being would have cared to remember—how he had always wanted to use that pink marbled soap to wash with, how he would never wear a certain kind of hat that all the other boys wore, how he would not take cream in his coffee. Human relationships were what they understood, the things to which they clung.

Gradually, in spite of his amusement and pleasure at arousing their amazement, he grew quiet, and soon ceased talking altogether. These things of which he spoke seemed, even to him, far away. The autumn air, cool and sunny, came in through the open door. He could look out and see along the crest of the upland pasture, oaks with blood-red patches through which the sun shone. Sometimes a rooster crowed; sometimes a flock of birds whirred up from the tree outside. Years dropped away. He began to realize in his secret mind a kind of sameness under everything. He imagined himself in the midst of whirling water suddenly touching bedrock and finding it just about what it had always been.

They began to talk to him, to tell him all about Will and Jack and Eddie and May and Dollie; and about the boys and girls whom he had known in school—how this one had married such a one, and this one had died, and this one moved into town. He could see that all the while they were still puzzling themselves as to why *he* had never married, and feeling, in spite of their pride in his accomplishments, a kind of sorrow that they could not see *him,* like the other boys, settled. He began to feel even a kind of dissatisfaction with himself, to think with distaste of the journey he must take that night, vaguely to wish that in all the world, there was something to which he could feel himself as attached as they were to these hills.

The old man wandered off after a time, lay down on the lounge in the dining room, and went to sleep.

"Pa's gettin' to sleep so much," the old lady complained. "I'm real ashamed of him in church. Oh, we've got a lovely minister now, Ralph! I wish ye could hear him." And then she said, "I'm going over to the cemetery, my dear. Wouldn't ye like to come along? Grandpa and Grandma's there now, ye know, Pa's folks and mine. Yes, do. Put on your cap. We'll go over there together and let Pa have his nap."

She put on her little black straw hat and he took his traveling cap in his hand. He loitered about the yard while she picked some of the late asters to take with her, and showed him just where she had had all her summer flowers, lamenting that he had come too late to see the four-o'clocks and moss roses and sweet peas. Then they went along the road together, Ralph checking his brisk walk to suit her slow step.

He opened the small iron gate of the cemetery for her. The big gate for vehicles, with its imposing scroll top, was locked with a chain. He followed her into the quiet place. The grass was still a little green. The tall evergreens stood in a somber dusk, and the little breeze, that was so sunny and fresh outside, made a different sound in their big creaking boughs. Still, it was a pleasant place, with the low brown hills and the pastures beyond, the autumn woods, and the little town off at the west. Some of the trees were noisy with birds.

As he followed Mother Hockaday past the Soldiers' Monument, he noted the familiar names on the stones—Wade, Wood, Penhollow, Davies, Stonecipher, Reed. Since he had been here, one generation had slowly and almost imperceptibly passed, had taken up its abode in this quiet place not very far from the old homes. That had its beauty.

The Hockaday lot was in a corner of the cemetery. He pleased Mother Hockaday by admiring the plain stone of polished granite with a kind of scroll at the top, instead of the lofty monument of the Reeds. He stood watching her. These rites had long been strange to him. She plucked off some withered flowers on the mound with the small headstone "Mother," and he filled for her at the pump a glass that had tipped over and that had a faint greenish stain and odor of wilted flowers. She did not seem sad, only calm and cherishing, as when she went about her household tasks. He saw that the asters were not for Grandma and Grandpa but for a little grave that he had quite forgotten—of the little two-year-old Agnes who had died of diphtheria nearly forty years ago. The little old-fashioned white slab, on which the letters were faint and weatherworn, slanted back over the small sunken mound.

"Some of those autumn leaves would look nice, wouldn't they, Ralph?" the old lady said. "You know you can paraffin them. If we had time we'd go into the woods and get some, wouldn't we? I always think the hard maples are so lovely."

She was not through yet. She had kept some of the pink asters for another small grave. A white log roughly cut, on which a lamb was lying, guarded it.

"'Adelaide Mellon,'" he read softly. Why, *I* knew her, didn't I, Mother? I remember when she died."

"Sure you did. Mrs. Mellon's been gone a good while, Ralph, but I promised her when she lay sick I'd keep little Adelaide's grave just like she'd always kept it herself. She was a lovely woman, Mrs. Mellon was. These plants look kind o' spindling."

Ralph wandered off a little way. A faint smile was on his lips, less brilliant and more thoughtful than usually was there. He looked past the stones to the russet woods, letting the breeze stir his hair.

Mother Hockaday came and laid her hand on his arm. "What ye thinkin' about, my dear?"

He turned about. "That this wouldn't be such a bad place to sleep in, some day," he answered half whimsically.

She replied quite seriously. "So ye can, my dear, but I hope it won't be for a long while yet. You're one of us; sure you are."

He arched his brows. He did not know whether or not there was anything serious in what he had said. In his theory, the cast-off body mattered nothing. "Oh, I fly about so much, Mother, no telling where I'll end up. China or Van Dieman's Land—"

She was perturbed. "Don't say that, Ralph. No, I don't like to think of you off by yourself somewhere."

"Let me carry your basket, Mother," he urged with sudden vivacity.

The old man was just coming out to the yard to look for them when they reached home. The day was going fast. The trees threw long shadows. They had supper, and after that the children drove in.

They came in Fords instead of the old buggies, but the Fords were filled just as the buggies had been with the shy staring eyes of children. May had not been able to get in, but all the rest had come. They seemed to make a great noise when they all came tramping into the house. They greeted Ralph with bashful loudness.

He was astounded at the rustic look of these foster brothers which seemed to him more rural, somehow than that of other Middle-western farmers. They were prosperous, he knew, and he had expected them to be what is called "up-and-coming," to have left the old people far behind. All of the boys except Will, who was the oldest, had thick untrimmed shocks of hair that curled about their ears and reddened necks, and Will had a patriarchal beard. Their calm eyes, slow speech, their clumsy shoes, and rosy cheeks—they were astonishingly like the English yokels whom he had seen about the doors of thatch-roofed cottages. So many of the old characteristics had survived. Only Dollie had the rippling hair and sweetly-cut features of her mother, and was, in spite of her country dress and her six children, a pretty woman. But children—what families they all had! Will with eleven and Jack with eight! It seemed to him that endless relays of them were being herded shyly up to "see Uncle Ralph."

They were all a little bashful with Ralph, even Jack, his old chum; and he had a feeling of helpless dismay at the gulf which seemed to lie between him and them. He felt again a man of the world, not the old persistent self that he had been recapturing that afternoon with the old people. He was introduced solemnly to the wives and to

Dollie's husband, all of whom remembered him so well that he had to pretend also to recall them. "Sure—Girlie Wade, don't you remember her?" They pumped his hand, Will owlishly, almost Biblically solemn, the others with abrupt awkward meaningless laughs. They settled down in the parlor and an agonized hush held them (broken by low commands and whispers to the children) until Mother Hockaday set them going with her repetitions of how glad she was that they could come in to see Ralph, and how sorry that May couldn't come. They began to talk shyly to him and he to answer with a somewhat exaggerated vivacity to cover his dismay.

They asked about what he had been doing "all this time," and where he had been, saying—"That so?" and "Listen to that," laughed loudly at whatever he told them that seemed odd or (to them) fanciful, and yet with a kind of blankness in their eyes that rather disconcerted him. He did not know that they were hoarding up all that he said to bring out, and to mull over, endlessly. But still it was an effort; they were uncomfortable, until they fell into the old observations and repetitions and human discussions again. Ralph sat back listening.

"You going to have woodchoppers again this year, Dollie?"

"Oh, I guess so. Fred, he wants to thin out them willows down near the creek."

"Yeh, them willows don't do any good there."

"Haul 'em into town, Fred. Willow makes good wood."

"Naw, willow don't. Maple does, now. Oak's the best wood. They ain't cuttin' much oak now. Got it too thinned out. *She* don't want the willow cut, even"—with a gesture of his thumb toward Dollie.

"No, I don't. I never want to see any of the old trees go down. I don't know, when they been there so long—"

"She keeps in the house where she can't hear them fall."

"Sure she does. I don't blame her. That's what I always done when Pa got to woodchopping. I likes the trees."

"Well, frost's holding off a good while."

"Yes, the hard maples ain't even red."

"Yes, but we'll have it. We'll have frost within a week and a frost to kill. Whenever we have a spell of real warm weather like this 'long about the first of October it's always followed by a hard frost. I ain't never known it to fail."

"Well, now, about the year 1902, we had an October like this and frost never come until the nineteenth of November."

"Well, we'll have frost. You see."

"Ed Robi'son's broke his arm, d'you know that? Broke it crankin' his car. The handle flew back on him and hit him right here above the elbow."

"Sure! I always knew he'd do that some time. He always took hold of it kind o' back-handed like. I told him so. I says, 'Ed, that'll fly back on you some day and break your arm for you.' No! He knew what he was doin'. Can't never tell a Robi'son nothing."

Ralph sat back and listened, his eyes now bright, yet full of a dreamy interest. His dismay slowly wore off. The talk seemed to bring him certain country things—the bitter sappy smell of a new-felled tree, the scent of nuts in autumn woods, the tanging smell of cider in the October sun, the dry ghostly crackle of the pale-gold cornstalks left standing in the fields. He began to feel a certain something about his foster brothers that satisfied him, that curiously pleased some primitive depth in him. He began to be glad of their slow voices, their odd turns of speech, their rustic air. These things suggested the deep stabilities of country life—the slow inevitable progression of the seasons, the nearness to earth and sky and weather, the unchanging processes of birth and death, the going of the birds in the fall and their sure return in the spring, the coming, night after night, of the familiar stars to the wide country sky.

Somehow it pleased him now to think of how deeply rooted they were. It gave him, confirmed wanderer as he was, "something to tie to." No wonder that they were so little changed. After all, where had they been? Back and forth over the same old roads, bringing their crops into Walnut. To Edinburgh to the County Fair or the Chautauqua on the night when Krill's Band played; and when they had real shopping to do, perhaps as far as Dubuque. They might have gone farther but they had little desire. Other places to them were a kind of dream. They laughed at them indulgently. Perhaps some day, when all the children were grown and they in turn had left the farm, they might "take a trip." But it would be without pleasure, largely under protest, and they would come home sooner than they had planned. "Pa, he got sick of it. Ma, she didn't want to stay no longer." People, even in Edinburgh, traveled widely now. But here they stayed close to their own soil.

The first strangeness had quite worn off. Ralph caught looks, characteristics, of the boys and girls he had known. They did the same with him. Jack, his old comrade, who had at first seemed the strangest, was now the most familiar. Under his red hardened skin his features had remained curiously unchanged. There was a kind of shy friendliness in Jack's eyes under that shock of hair—just as when they were children, not speaking to each other, perhaps, when there were other people present, but always conscious of the secret bond between them. It was there still, something kindred, under all the difference. Still that something that he liked about Jack, that made him feel a little closer to him than to all the rest. That was perhaps the one friendship, incongruous as it seemed, which would never break. He would always have the feeling that Jack was there.

At half-past nine they began to gather the children together. The old people had already endured visible agonies of sleepiness. They all became solemn and formal again, as they shook hands with Ralph and urged him to "Come and see *us* next time. Come when you can stay a little longer." Jack stood beside him for a few minutes, awkwardly, before he cranked the Ford. "Well, Ralph, better come out to the old place again. Still a few crappies, I guess, in the creek." "Thanks. I'll do that, Jack." "Yes, sure. Well—" Jack could not think of anything else to say. One of the children called, "Ain't you going to crank her, Pa?" "Well—I'll say good-bye, Ralph," he said then.

Ralph stood out on the lawn until even the sound of the cars was lost in the stillness of the country night. He looked up at a sky thick with stars. He heard the familiar sounds of the old people moving about in the house, going out to the kitchen, closing windows. Old Luke padded about in his stocking feet just as Grandpa Hockaday had always done. Finally Ralph went in.

His train left at eleven-thirty. Somehow he managed to overcome Mother Hockaday's scruples against his being allowed to go to the station alone, at having no one to "see him off safely." He could see that the old man was in an agony to get to bed. For the last hour he had been squirming in his chair, easing first one leg and then the other. Mother Hockaday kept saying, "I can't think we're doing right, Ralph, to let ye go off by yourself"; but he managed to take leave of them at the house.

Father Hockaday became impressively solemn. He held Ralph's hand in a hard and yet feeble grip. Ralph returned the pressure, stirred at the feel of the rough, aged skin. "Ralph, the Lord keep ye," the old man said.

Ralph turned to Mother Hockaday. He took her silently in his arms. When he let her go, he could see tears in her eyes, but she followed him to the door smiling mistily.

"Well, Ralph, I hope ye have a good safe journey. And get some sleep on the way."

"I will. Don't worry. Good-bye, Father. Good-bye, Mother."

He hurried off. They still stood in the lighted doorway. At the gate he looked back and made a gay gesture of good-bye.

Father Hockaday, who still had a great respect for trains, had insisted on getting him off in plenty of time. He walked very slowly. He did not look back at the old house, which showed a light now in the bedroom window, but he was conscious of it. Conscious of the old people whom he might never see again. Instead, he looked at the silent street, where never a light shone, where his heels rang out loudly. He looked at the thick strewing of stars on the night sky. The low line of hills was just visible, a patch of immovable darkness.

Only the agent was at the station. Ralph got his ticket, then went outdoors again and sat down on an empty baggage truck. He could hear the click of the telegraph inside. It sounded sharp and lonely. The air was chill outside, but it pleased him.

His lips were curved in a musing smile. Tomorrow this little place would seem a million miles away—almost out of existence. But he was aware that since he had stepped off the train in the morning, the current of his thoughts had been changed. He felt steadied, deeply satisfied. He looked toward the dark pastures beyond the row of dusky willow trees. They widened slowly into the open country which lay silent, significant, motionless, immense, under the stars, with its sense of something abiding. To come back to it was to touch the core of things.

The train came in—huge, noisy, threatening in the silence. Ralph sprang expertly aboard. The familiar sense of travel engulfed him immediately. He had found his berth, arranged things swiftly, before the station of Walnut was left behind. He was alert, modern, a traveler again.

But all night long, as he lay half sleeping, swinging slightly with the motion of the train, he was conscious of that silent spreading country outside, over which changes passed like the clouds above the pastures, and it gave him a deep quietude.

INVOCATION

Stephen Vincent Benet

Not for the great, not for the marvelous,
Not for the barren husbands of the gold,
Not for the arrowmakers of the soul,
Wasted with truth, the star-regarding wise;
Not even for those few
Who would not be the hunter nor the prey,
Who stood between the eater and the meat,
The wilderness saints, the guiltless, the absolved,
Born out of Time, the seekers of the balm
Where the green grass grows from the broken heart;
But for all these, the nameless numberless
Seed of the field, the mortal wood and earth
Hewn for the clearing, trampled for the floor,
Uprooted and cast out upon the stone
From Jamestown to Benicia.
This is their song, this is their testament,
Carved to their likeness, speaking in their tongue
And branded with the iron of their star.
I say you shall remember them. I say
When night has fallen on your loneliness
And the deep wood beyond the ruined wall
Seems to step forward swiftly with the dusk
You shall remember them. You shall not pass
Water or wheat or axe-mark on the tree
And not remember them.
You shall not win without remembering them
For they won every shadow of the moon,
All the vast shadows, and you shall not lose
Without a dark remembrance of their loss,
For they lost all and none remembered them.

Hear the wind
Blow through the buffalo-grass
Blow over wild grape and brier.

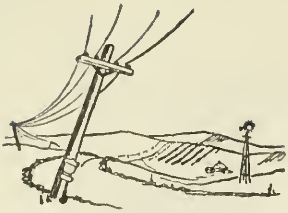
This was frontier, and this,
And this, your house, was frontier.
There were footprints upon the hill
And men lie buried under,
Tamers of earth and rivers.
They died at the end of labor.
Forgotten is the name.

Now, in full summer, by the Eastern shore,
Between the seamark and the roads going West,
I call two oceans to remember them.
I fill the hollow darkness with their names.

TASTING THE MOUNTAIN SPRING

Loren C. Eiseley

The spring comes to us through a mile of wood
Beginning in the high cold acres where
Snow water starts, but seeping downward there
Through veins of crystal, takes a darker mood,
Feeds roots—things at the abysmal sources of
All life. Sticks and wet stones and thirsts
Of worm and toad-stool, unseen starry bursts
Of damp wood-pollen fill it—taste enough
To let you know it has come down the brink
Of more than thunder. . . . In this foaming ditch
Water with earth's iron tainted and defiled
Mingles with stars, but, for myself, I drink
Like fawn or antelope, untasting which,
So long as all that water's quick and wild.



The Whistle

Eudora Welty

NIGHT fell. The darkness was thin, like some sleazy dress that has been worn and worn for many winters and always lets the cold through to the bones. Then the moon rose. The farm lay quite visible like a sunken stone among the stretches of deep woods in their colorless dead leaf. By a closer and more searching eye than the moon's, the tiny tomato plants belonging to the Mortons might have been seen in their neat rows beside the house—gray and feather-like, appalling in their exposed fragility. The moonlight covered everything, and lay upon the darkest shape of all, the farmhouse where the lamp had just been blown out.

Inside, Jason and Sara Morton were lying between the quilts of a pallet which had been made up close to the fireplace. A fire still fluttered in the grate, making a drowsy sound now and then, and its exhausted light beat up and down the wall, across the rafters, and over the dark pallet where the old people lay, like a bird trying to find its way out of the room.

The long-spaced, tired breathing of Jason was the only noise besides the flutter of the fire. He lay under the quilt in a long shape like a bean, turned on his side to face the barred door. His thin beard hung from his wryly held jaw, his lips moved once in the silence, and in and out he breathed, in and out, slowly and with a sound like a wind among the dead trees—a rattle and a sigh.

Sara lay on her back with her toothless mouth agape, as silent as Jason was noisy. Her eyes seemed opened too wide, the lids strained and limp, like openings which have been stretched shapeless and made useless. She was staring at the dark and indistinguishable places among the rafters. Once a hissing yellow flame stood erect on the old log, and her grey face and carrot-colored hair, flattened on the pallet, were illuminated for a moment, with shadows bright-blue. Then she laid her sleeve across her eyes.

Neither husband nor wife had spoken. They lay trembling with cold, but no more communicative in their misery than a pair of windowshutters beaten by a storm. Sometimes many days, weeks, went by without words. They were fifty years old; their lives were filled with tiredness, with a great lack of necessity to speak, with poverty which may have bound them like a disaster too great for any discussion but left them still separate and undesirous of sympathy. Perhaps, years ago, the long habit of silence may have been started in anger or passion. Who could tell now?

As the fire grew lower and lower, Jason's breathing grew heavy and solemn, and at last he was asleep. Sara's body was as weightless as a strip of cane; there was hardly a shape to the quilt under which she was lying, and sometimes it seemed to her that it was her lack of weight which kept her from ever getting warm. Sara was so tired of the cold! That was all it could do any more—make her tired. Year after year, she felt sure that she would die before the cold was over. Now, according to the almanac, it was spring. But year after year, it was all the same. This was not their farm any longer now; it belonged to Mr. Perkins, but that too was almost forgotten in the sameness of the years. The tomato plants would be set out in their frames, transplanted always too soon, often killed before any start had been made at all. And then some years they would grow tall and full, if the freezes only held off, and then there was a crop.

Like a vain dream, Sara began to have thoughts of the spring and summer. At first she thought only simply—of the colors of green and red, the smell of sun on the ground, of leaves and warm ripening tomatoes. Then, her arms pressing together under the quilt, she began to imagine and remember the town of Verdy in the shipping season. It became a time of almost legendary festivity, a place of pleasure. On the roads everybody was bringing tomatoes to the packing sheds on the railroad at Verdy Station, where Mr. Perkins, the tall gesticulating figure, stood in the very center of everything, buying, directing, waving telegrams, shouting with impatience. Long trains of empty freight cars stood waiting and being filled. There were all the strange people —the younger farmers they never saw at any other time, the harassed storekeepers of Verdy, the packers who had come all the way from Florida, tanned, stockingless, some of them tattooed. The music box was playing in the café across the road, and the old crippled man was back taking pictures for a dime of the young people with their heads together. The men were getting drunk, and a pistol would go off. The children were having a tomato fight and running along beside the railroad track, smeared red and screaming, bumping into their elders. In the sheds the sorters were throwing out onto the rotting ground the hundreds of oversized tomatoes, the irregulars, the overripe. A strong, sickening, sweet smell hung over everything. Some of the packers were resting for only a moment, stretched out, stained with sweat, in the shade, and one was playing a guitar. The girl wrappers from Florida had small brown hands, young, incredibly rapid, red with juice. Their faces were sleepy and flushed; when the men spoke to them, they laughed.

And Jason and Sara would be standing there. How quickly the tomatoes were purchased! They were nodding their heads, and then there was nothing else to do but stand in the burning sun near the shed, watching the tomatoes shoved at once into the breath-taking procedure of sorting, wrapping, loading . . . seeing that it was all over with, that they were out of it now, themselves, of no more use, even to Mr. Perkins, until another year. The packers would walk by and stare at them briefly, burned brown from Florida, where the crops there had driven down the Mississippi prices to almost nothing again. In Florida, perhaps, it did not freeze in spring. Later, in Mr. Perkins' book, a few small debts might be written off, leaving the longstanding debts still there. Sometimes the season lasted six weeks, sometimes only three. It depended on the weather.

Sara, cold, stiff and weightless under the quilt, could think of the pleasures of Verdy and of the ripe tomatoes only in brief snatches, like the flare-up of the little fire. The rest of the time she thought only of cold, of the cold going on before and after. She felt the chill of the here and now, which was not to think at all, but was only a trembling in the dark.

She coughed patiently and turned her head to one side. She peered beneath her arm and saw that the fire had at last gone out and left only a hulk of red log, a still red bent shape, like one of Jason's wool socks thrown into the fireplace. With only this to comfort her, Sara closed her eyes and fell asleep. The husband and wife now lay perfectly still, with Jason's hoarse, slow breathing, like the commotion of some clumsy old bear trying to climb a tree, heard by nobody at all.

Every hour it was getting colder and colder. The moon, intense and white as the snow that never falls in Mississippi, drew lower in the sky, in the long night, and nearer to earth. The farm looked as hard and still as a sea shell, with the little knob of a house surrounded by its curved furrows of tomato plants. Cold like a white pressing hand reached down and lay over the shell.

In Verdy there is a great whistle which is blown when a freeze threatens. It is Mr. Perkins' whistle. Now it sounded out in the clear night, blast after blast. Over the countryside, lights appeared in the windows of the farms, and men and women ran out into the fields and covered up their plants with whatever they had.

Jason Morton was not waked up by the great whistle. On and on he slept, his cavernous breathing like roars coming from a hollow tree. His right hand had been thrown out in his sleep and lay stretched on the cold floor, all its misshapen swollen fingers, with the big veins standing in them, shining in the moonlight which had moved across the room.

Sara felt herself waking. She knew that the whistle was blowing, what it meant—and that it now remained for her to get Jason and go out to the field. A soft laxity, an illusion of warmth, flowed stubbornly down her body and for a few moments she continued to lie still.

Then she was sitting up and seizing her husband by the shoulders, without saying a word, rocking him back and forth. It took all her strength. He coughed and sat up. He said nothing either, and they both listened to the whistle. After a silence, it blew again, a long rising blast.

Sara and Jason got out of bed. They were both fully dressed, except for their shoes, because of the cold. Jason lighted the lantern and Sara gathered the bedclothes over her arm and followed him out.

Everything was white. White in a shadowed pit, abandoned from summer to summer, the old sorghum mill stood like the machine of a dream, with its long prostrate pole, its blunted axis.

Stooping over the little plants, Jason and Sara touched them and touched the earth. For their own knowledge, by their hands, they found everything to be true—the cold, the rightness of the warning, the desperation. Over the sticks set in among the plants, they laid all the quilts, spreading them with a slow ingenuity. Jason took off his coat and laid it over the small tender plants by the side of the house. Then he glanced at Sara, and she reached down and pulled her dress off over her head. Her hair fell down out of its pins and she began at once to tremble violently. The skirt was long and full, and all the rest of the plants were covered by the dress. Then Sara and Jason stood for a moment and stared almost idly at the field and up at the sky.

There was no wind. There was only the intense whiteness of moonlight. Yet its cold sank into them like the teeth of a trap. They bent their shoulders and walked silently back into the house.

The room was not much warmer. They had forgotten to shut the door behind them when they went out. Jason poured kerosene over more kindling and struck a light to it. Squatting, they got near it and sat motionless until it had all burned down. Then Jason, in his underwear and long blue trousers, went out and brought in another load, and the last big cherry log which they had been saving.

The extravagant warmth of the room had sent some kind of agitation over Sara, like her memories of Verdy in the shipping season. She sat huddled in a long brown cotton petticoat with a string run around the waist. Her carrot-colored hair, white at the temples, was hanging loose down to her shoulders, like a child's unbound for a party. She held her knees against her numb, pendulant breasts and stared into the fire, her eyes widening.

On the other side of the hearth, Jason watched the fire burning too. His thin cracked lips parted, and through his open mouth his breath came quickly, gently, noiselessly, as though he were concealing all his tiredness. He lifted his long arms and held his trembling misshapen hands out to the fire.

Towards morning the kindling was all gone. The cherry log had burned to ashes. Jason and Sara sat in darkness, where their bed had lain, and it was colder than ever.

Sara trembled violently, again pressing her hard knees against her breast. In the return of winter, of the night's cold, something strange, like fright, or dependency, a sensation of complete loss, took possession of her shaking body.

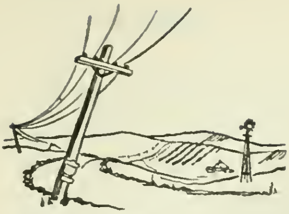
All at once she spoke, without turning her head, but loudly.

"Jason, are you cold over there?"

She heard a silence break the rhythm of his difficult breathing. But only for a moment.

"No," said her husband's uncertain voice.

Then they were silent as before.



The Duel With Yellow Hand

Stanley Vestal

WHEN, early in 1876, war was declared against Sitting Bull and the Sioux, Buffalo Bill was restless, fretting at the monotony of daily appearances in the theater. As Chief of Scouts for the Fifth Cavalry, he felt that his place was once more on the frontier; but he went on with his work, appearing regularly before crowded houses. Then, one night in Chicago as he sat in his dressing room, a telegram was handed in. Forgetful of his part, Cody rushed out on the stage without waiting for his cue. He waved the telegram above his head and shouted that he was through playing at war; he was going out West to take part in a *real* war. General Sheridan had summoned him for service with the Big Horn and Yellowstone Expedition, commanded by Brigadier General George Crook. He was assigned to his old outfit, the Fifth United States Cavalry, then commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Eugene Carr.

The crowd applauded wildly; Cody waved his hat, rushed from the theater, and boarded a train.

When he arrived at Cheyenne, Wyoming, he was still wearing the black velvet Mexican suit, handsomely decorated with gold lace and silver buttons, which he wore in the theater; he was too eager to rejoin the Fifth Cavalry to stop to buy new clothes. He hired a rig and drove out to Fort D. A. Russel, looking more like a Spanish bullfighter than a frontier scout. When he got down from the buckboard, Colonel Carr and the veterans of the regiment did not recognize Cody at first. They had never before seen him in such a fantastic costume.

Then somebody saw his long hair and let out a yell: "It's Buffalo Bill! Hey, Bill, where did you get that hat?" They accused him of trying to pass himself off as a Mexican general.

In those days Indian fighters dressed to suit themselves. In fact, even soldiers of the regular army paid little attention to uniform regulations while on campaign. All who could substituted felt hats, buckskins, buffalo coats, cardigan jackets, and moccasins for the regulation forage cap, blue jacket, and boots. Hardly one in five of the soldiers was in uniform when riding after Indians. So after the first big laugh, nobody paid any attention to Cody's clothes. On the frontier a man could wear what he liked.

For a few days Cody remained at the post, looking up old friends, of whom he had very many in the regiment. As Captain Charles King reports in his book, *Campaigning With Crook and Stories of Army Life,* "The Fifth had a genuine affection for Bill; he was a tried and true comrade—one who for cool daring and judgment had no superior. He was a beautiful horseman, an unrivalled shot, and as a scout unequalled. We had tried them all—Hualpais and Tontos in Arizona; half-breeds on the great plains. We had followed Custer's old guide, 'California Joe,' in Dakota; met handsome Bill Hickok (Wild Bill) in the Black Hills; trailed for weeks after Crook's favorite, Frank Grouard, all over the Big Horn and Powder River country; hunted Nez Percés with Cosgrove and his Shoshones among the Yellowstone mountains, and listened to 'Captain Jack' Crawford's yarns and rhymes in many a bivouac in the Northwest. They were all noted men in their way, but Bill Cody was the paragon."

Buffalo Bill and the regiment headed north for Fort Laramie about the middle of June, 1876. There were eight troops in the outfit. On the twenty-second of June they moved on from the fort with orders to find the old Indian trail which led northwest from the Red Cloud and Spotted Tail Reservations and Camp Robinson toward the camps of Sitting Bull's hostile Sioux, supposed to be somewhere between the Yellowstone River and the Big Horn Mountains. It was their duty to intercept any Indians leaving the reservations to join Sitting Bull. Cody, as Chief of Scouts for the regiment, led the way.

The main Indian trails were well beaten. The Indians were in the habit of leaving the reservation to hunt buffalo, as allowed by their treaties with the United States. When they went on a hunt, they were usually absent for weeks and sometimes months, and took along their tents and families. They had no wagons. The women bundled the tent cover on a pack horse and tied the tepee poles to the saddle, letting the ends drag on either side of the horse. This made a triple rut, and a main trail consisted of several of these triple ruts running side by side.

The soldiers struck the trail they were looking for in the valley of the South Cheyenne River (the Dry Fork), where they made camp. This was on the twenty-fifth of June—a fatal day for the United States Army, though Buffalo Bill and his comrades had not dreamed of defeat. At the time, they knew only that Generals Custer, Terry, and Gibbon were in command of three expeditions with orders to converge on the hostile camp of the Sioux.

Cody and his men were kept busy scouting in the neighborhood, watching all the trails along which Indians might push to the northwest. On July 1 Colonel Wesley Merritt arrived in camp, having been promoted to the command of the expedition. On the third, two troops saw Indians and gave chase. But after a ride lasting all day, the Indians outran them. It was difficult for cavalrymen to overtake Indians, for the savages had many horses and could travel fast; whereas the soldier had but one, which was loaded down with heavy equipment, ammunition, and rations.

On July 7, just after daybreak, a courier came riding with a brief message: "Custer and five troops, Seventh Cav., killed."

The news of this disaster was like a bombshell. Custer was a famous general, a seasoned cavalryman of the Civil War, renowned for his dash and courage. He was popularly known as the Boy General, and in all his service he had never lost a gun or flag. Now he was gone. It was hard for Cody and his comrades to believe that. But if it were true, it called for vengeance.

Far to the north in Montana on the Big Horn River, General Custer and five troops of his regiment had been wiped out by the Indians of Sitting Bull's camp. Custer had been in disgrace because he had exposed the corruption of President Grant's Indian Administration. He had been eager to redeem himself, and had pushed his men very hard in order to reach the hostile camp before Terry and Gibbon could get there. He had hoped to win a great victory, and then become a candidate for the presidency of the United States. His scouts had told him that he would find more Indians with Sitting Bull than he could handle, but Custer did not believe them. He had always beaten the redskins.

He divided his command into three parts. Major Reno went north down the Little Horn. Captain Benteen was sent to strike from the west, while Custer rode along the bluffs, heading for the ford east of the camp. Reno arrived first and found himself outnumbered; driven back with heavy losses, he dug in on the bluffs. Benteen was delayed, and had to turn back and join Reno. Meanwhile, Custer had been surrounded on the bluffs, and his force wiped out by thousands of warriors.

Cody and the Fifth Cavalry, of course, knew none of this except what had come in the message. The stunned regiment stayed in camp for two days, awaiting orders. On July 10 a dispatch arrived from the commanding officer at Camp Robinson on the reservation: "Southern Cheyennes preparing to take the warpath." The same day orders came: "March to Fort Laramie. Fill up with supplies. Then march via Fort Fetterman to join command of General Crook." On July 11, a second messenger galloped from Camp Robinson: "Cheyennes surely going, probably 800 strong."

By this time Chief Spotted Tail, who had watched the troops leave Fort Laramie, had spread the news of their march up and down the country. Many Indians began planning to leave the agencies earlier than they had intended, fearing that the soldiers might prevent them from joining Sitting Bull.

It seemed certain that the Indians would outnumber the troops. Next day the Fifth Cavalry marched back toward Fort Laramie and made camp on a small stream in a furious storm of rain and hail. Another day's march brought them to Rawhide Creek. This stream took its name from the fact that in earlier days the Indians had there skinned a white man alive for killing one of their women. On July 14 the regiment camped at the crossing of the Laramie-Robinson road, hoping to receive news from the fort at that point.

When Colonel Merritt knew the Cheyennes were coming, he was in a difficult position. His duty was to stop the Indians and keep them from joining Sitting Bull, but his orders were to combine forces with General Crook. If he let the Indians get away to join Sitting Bull and thus strengthen hostile forces, he might be court-martialed for neglect of duty. On the other hand, if he failed to join Crook, he could be court-martialed for disobedience of orders. He was faced with a hard decision.

But Colonel Merritt was no weakling. He made his decision at once: Let General Crook take care of himself. Merritt called the bugler and gave his orders. The man put the trumpet to his lips and sounded *Boots and Saddles.*

Within a few minutes the command was on the march, heading for Hat Creek, sometimes called Warbonnet Creek, where the Indian trail from Camp Robinson crossed. From Camp Robinson on the reservation to that point on Hat Creek the Indians would have to ride only about thirty miles, or one day's march. To head them off the Fifth Cavalry would have to ride eighty miles in the same time.

In those days a man with two good horses, one to ride and the other to lead, so that he could change from one to the other frequently, might cover a hundred miles or a little more in a single day. An expert horseman on an excellent horse, traveling light, would ordinarily do seventy-five miles. Indians in a hurry, traveling with their families and many spare horses, could make fifty miles a day. The average march for mounted troops with full equipment was seldom more than twenty.

But the Fifth Cavalry, starting at 1 p. m. and following the old Black Hills Road from Fort Laramie, reached their objective after being in the saddle thirty-one marching hours! This ride is famous in the annals of the United States Cavalry. Buffalo Bill and his scouts rode at the head of the command all the way.

About sunset the second day the soldiers reached Hat Creek near the mouth of Antelope Creek, just north of the Black Hills Stage Road which came in from the west. The Indian trail crossed this stage road east of Hat Creek and went on to the northwest. This crossing of the trails was due north of the present town of Montrose, in the far northwest corner of Nebraska. South of the crossing was Picket Hill. The regiment halted in the brush and timber under the bluff along the creek, out of sight of the Indian trail.

Worn out by their record ride, the men had also had no supper, for their rations were exhausted. In order to travel so fast, they had carried only enough for one day. The weary troopers unsaddled, rolled up in their blankets, and were soon snoring. No fires were lighted; no trumpet calls were sounded. Orders were given to maintain strict silence. The camp was in blackout.

But there was no rest for Buffalo Bill, though he was supperless, like all the others. He needed a man for lookout—a man he could depend upon. On the scout detail was a trooper named Chris Madsen. Madsen belonged to the Fifth Cavalry; before coming to the United States, he had fought well through several campaigns in Denmark, Africa, and France. He was a real soldier, faithful, brave, and cool in the face of danger. Bill knew that Chris understood signaling and was equipped with signal flags and torches. Of course, he also had field glasses.

Bill, therefore, ordered him to act as lookout and stationed him on top of Picket Hill, a conical bare butte with a few rocks lying about the summit, which overlooked all that rolling prairie country. Chris had a fine view of the low hills from which the Indians were expected to emerge. He could also see the regiment in camp under the bluffs and could signal messages to it.

But Buffalo Bill never demanded that his men do more than he was ready to do himself. He had led the regiment to the Indian trail, and had made sure that the Cheyennes had not yet passed by. But he had still to locate their camp. Long before daylight, Bill saddled up and prepared to leave Madsen's station. "I'm going to find those Indians," he said, and rode off alone into the darkness, heading for the Indian trail.

This was a dangerous mission, for a careless man might run head-on into the Indian camp before he knew it. But Cody understood his business. Quietly he rode forward along the Indian trail, mile after mile, until he heard a faint sound in the distance. He reined up to listen. Far off, across a ridge, he heard a sharp bark. Wolves do not bark. That dog must belong to some Indian. Cautiously he rode up, got off his horse, and peered over the ridge. He could just make out the dim white cones which he knew were the tepees of the Indian camp. The Cheyennes had evidently started late and traveled slowly the previous day. Cody waited until he saw them catching their ponies to break camp. Then he slipped back down the ridge, mounted his horse, and hurried back to Picket Hill. There he told Madsen what he had found; the lookout began to signal this information to Colonel Merritt at the camp.

The tired sentries on watch at the camp were sleepy and slow to catch the signals. It would soon be daybreak; Cody could not wait. He rode down the butte, crossed the creek, and delivered his message to the colonel in person.

Captain Charles King, the adjutant, had the men awakened immediately. They were hungry, but there was no breakfast for them, not even a cup of coffee; the wagon train with the supplies was far behind, coming along somewhere on the Black Hills Stage Road. It did not take long to saddle up. The troopers stood holding their horses, waiting under the bluffs for the command to mount. Colonel Merritt, Captain King, and Buffalo Bill climbed the hill to Madsen's station. There they kept watch, waiting for the Cheyennes to appear over the hills to the east.

Chris Madsen with his glasses was the first to see the Indians coming—a small group of about fifty warriors, riding far in advance to spy out the land ahead of the main party. Cody and his scouts kept out of sight as the Indians jogged slowly along. After a bit the main camp came into view far behind, marching at a walk—dogs, pack mules, and all. There were hundreds of the Indians, so many that they were not afraid to travel slowly. It looked as if they would ride right into the trap.

Then suddenly everything went wrong. Cody and his companions saw the advance group of warriors turn sharply to the left, out of the main trail, and down a ravine leading to the southwest.

At first Cody could see no reason for this swift change of direction. Then, scanning the country all around, he saw two mounted couriers riding up the Black Hills Stage Road from the west, and behind them the wagon train rolling along, unmindful of danger. Those Cheyenne warriors were heading for the wagon train, hoping to cut off the couriers and launch a surprise attack. The wagons were almost undefended. The couriers were sure to be killed. Instantly, Cody informed the colonel.

Colonel Merritt could not sit on the hill and allow the Indians to wipe out those men. He ordered Cody to try to reach and warn the wagon train. Cody galloped down the butte, rounded up fifteen scouts and soldiers, and galloped off again, leaving Madsen and the two officers on Picket Hill, where they could see it all.

That morning Cody was mounted on a small bay horse—an unruly, headstrong animal, which most men were afraid to ride. Cody led the scouts away from the camp to the southwest, so that they were hidden from the Indians by the butte and then along a dry, grassy ravine quite out of sight of the Indians. Thus the Indians were riding along one ravine and Cody along another.

These two ravines ran together on a flat open space to the south of Picket Hill. Cody did not know that, and, of course, the Indians were not expecting him. But Chris Madsen, Colonel Merritt, and Captain

King could see everything from the top of the butte. All three were eyewitnesses of what followed.

Cody galloped along some distance ahead of his scattered men on their fagged horses. The leader of the Cheyennes, Yellow Hand or Yellow Hair, was also far ahead of the other braves.

Suddenly, only a hundred yards away, Cody saw the Indian coming on his calico pony. The other scouts, far behind, had not yet seen him. The Cheyenne was no doubt surprised, but he was a brave man. He let out a yell and dashed forward. Buffalo Bill never looked back; the minute he saw Yellow Hand, he spurred his horse forward and threw up his rifle to fire. At the same moment the Indian raised his own weapon. Both fired. The reports sounded like one shot.

Through the smoke of the discharge, Cody saw the Indian slump forward on his pony's neck as the pinto went down. At the same moment he felt his own horse falling under him. It had stepped into a prairie-dog hole. Cody jumped clear of the horse, lost his feet, and fell. As he got up, he saw Yellow Hand crouching by his dead horse, with ready rifle. The Indian fired again. Kneeling, Buffalo Bill took deliberate aim and fired his second shot at the Indian's head. That ended the battle; the warrior slumped to the ground. Cody mounted his horse, rode over to the fallen Indian and dismounted. The first bullet had passed through the Indian's leg to kill his pony; the second had gone through his head.

When their leader fell, the other Indians came swarming forward, yelping and whooping, to kill Cody. By that time, however, his small party of scouts was coming up; and soon after, Colonel Mason at the head of Troop K came racing around the butte to his rescue. A few shots were fired. Then the Indians, seeing themselves outnumbered, quickly turned around and high-tailed it back toward their main body.

Cody looked at the man he had killed. Yellow Hand was wearing an American flag for a breech cloth! In the Indian's hair was tied a scalp—a long yellow curl, the hair of some young woman. Cody whipped out his knife and quickly removed Yellow Hand's own scalp.

As the troops filed by, their carbines still in the boots on their saddles, Cody stood up and waved Yellow Hand's warbonnet and hair over his head. He had taken "the first scalp for Custer." What was more important, he had turned all those Indians back, rescued the couriers, and probably saved Colonel Merritt from a court-martial. Sometimes a single combat produces a great victory.

Long after, a number of persons threw doubt upon this brave deed of Buffalo Bill and declared that the Indian named Yellow Hand or Yellow Hair had been killed by someone else. But the statements of Colonel Merritt, Captain King, and Chris Madsen all agree in giving Cody the whole credit. Merritt and King are now dead, but they have left a record of what they saw. Chris Madsen has had an unblemished record as a soldier and peace officer; he helped tame the bad men of early days in Oklahoma, where he still lives. Whenever you find three honest men together, the chances are one of them will be Chris Madsen.

On August 28, 1929, Madsen made a sworn statement in Oklahoma County, Oklahoma, describing what happened in the fight with Yellow Hand. "It was Cody who killed Yellow Hand," he declares in this statement, "and no other shots were fired so far as I could hear or see until the Indian was done for. I was close enough to see it all, and besides was practically out of the danger zone." In a letter to the late Brigadier General W. C. Brown, U. S. A. retired, written at Guthrie, Oklahoma, on September 15, 1932, Madsen says: "It strikes me as a funny proposition that so many men who were present (or not present) at the time of the fight, claim to have killed the Indian. I served with most of those men for 15 years and never in all that time heard anyone claim to have even fired a shot, until after Cody was dead." Madsen goes on to name the man who, he says, "found all those killers." With regard to Cody's fight with Yellow Hand, Madsen adds: "I was in a place where I had a good chance to have fired a shot at the Indian, but I was on duty to watch and report my observations and not to meddle with business of the troops operating under orders of their respective officers. So for that reason, I am about the only man who saw the fight who did not kill the Indian!"

Moreover, Sergeant John Hamilton of D Troop, Fifth United States Cavalry, in answer to questions put by General W. C. Brown, in a letter dated September 11, 1929, tells how the troops saddled before sunrise and waited behind the ridge. Hamilton was peeking over the ridge in front of his troop near Headquarters, perhaps four hundred yards from the Indians. He saw the fight. "I saw Cody and Yellow Hand about 100 yards apart going towards each other firing at the same time," he wrote. "The other scouts were some distance away and scattered. I saw Cody either jump or fall from his horse, remount, and ride over towards Yellow Hand, who either hung to his pony's neck or fell off. They were in a kind of hollow or swale. At that time nobody was around them.

"At this time I had to return to my troop, and we moved forward at a fast gait. My troop passed where Yellow Hand lay. I stopped within two yards of the dead chief to fix saddle on a pack mule that had become loose, with Private Daddy Aaron, and had a good look at him. He was laying on his stomach, head on folded or bent arms, his scalp was taken, and he had on his person a paint bag, a scalp of hair, yellow color, of some young woman, ten bracelets on arm, a charm, a wampum belt, war feather, moccasins, and a cotton American flag as a breech cloth. Being unable to lead the mule, I had the halter shank tied up. . . . I saw Cody that day with warbonnet and scalp. At dark Cody traveled at rear of the troop. I was rear Sergeant. He rode alongside of me until we got to Fort Robinson, Nebraska, sometime after dark."

In spite of all this, afterward some people not only denied that Buffalo Bill had killed Yellow Hand, but went further and said that the Indian was never scalped. But the testimony of living Indians belonging to Yellow Hand's family does not bear out their story.

When a monument was erected on Hat Creek near Montrose, Nebraska, at the site of Buffalo Bill's fight with Yellow Hand, those in charge arranged an interview with Cheyenne relatives of Yellow Hand then living on the reservation. One of these was Jim Tangle Yellow Hair of Ashland, nephew of Yellow Hand; and another, the dead man's sister, Josie Tangle Yellow Hair. Josie said that she herself did not witness her brother's death. About a month after the fight, however, Yellow Hand's relatives had gone out to look for his body. They had found the bones of the dead warrior, and on coming back said that they could tell he had been scalped.

Some people, unfamiliar with Indian warfare, have criticized Buffalo Bill for scalping the Indian. Such criticism seems unfair. From the beginning of Indian wars, white scouts had followed the Indian custom of scalping, saying that they must fight the devil with fire. The Indian valued his scalp above everything, believing that without it he could not be happy in the world to come. Indian warriors were not afraid of death. Many even looked forward to dying in battle. Only the fear of scalping could intimidate them or keep them from going on the warpath. Besides, it would have angered any white man to see that yellow curl dangling from Yellow Hand's hair. The Cheyennes often wore scalps of their victims in that manner. I myself once saw a long yellow curl, taken from the head of some unfortunate white girl, tied in the hair of an old warrior at the Cheyenne Sun Dance in Oklahoma in 1913. Even at that late date those white men who saw it were angry.

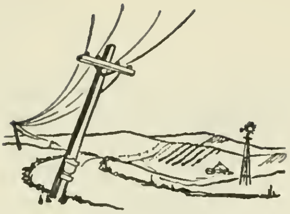
There can be no doubt, then, that Buffalo Bill killed and scalped Yellow Hand. The duel was "as plucky a single combat on both sides as is ever witnessed," in the words of Captain Charles King.

The "Record of Events" from the files of the War Department reports the fight, and subsequent happenings, thus: "Had an engagement with party of about 45 Indians on 17 July near Indian Creek—killing one Indian. No casualties in the regiment. Followed the Indians toward the Red Cloud Reservation. About twenty-five miles from that Agency, the trail of a very large body of Indians was struck where they had turned back (being evidently apprised of our approach by runners from the party attacked in the morning) towards the Agency at Red Cloud; the trail was followed to within a short distance of the Agency where it turned off the Reservation towards the Spotted Tail Agency. This movement prevented many hundred warriors from joining the hostiles in the northern country. The command arrived and encamped at Red Cloud on the night of July 17, 1876."

The records quoted here, containing the statements of Chris Madsen, Captain King, and Colonel Merritt, are now in the museum at Buffalo Bill's grave on Lookout Mountain, near Golden, Colorado. When you go there you may see Yellow Hand's scalp and the knife with which it was taken.

On the scene of the duel, located by Captain King, Chris Madsen, and others, there stands a monument, with the following inscription:

ON THIS SPOT
BUFFALO BILL
KILLED
YELLOW HAIR
THE
CHEYENNE LEADER WHO, WITH
A PARTY OF WARRIORS, DASHED
DOWN THIS RAVINE TO WAYLAY
TWO SOLDIERS COMING
FROM THE WEST
JULY 17, 1876



Shadow of a Green Olive Tree

Warren Beck

WHEN he was a little boy, John was fond of visiting his great-uncle, whose mellow voice and halo of grey hair he venerated, and whose companionable ways he loved. The Reverend Mr. George Hancock Bennett—said his mail. John knew that neither his father nor his grandfathers ever were called anything but plain Mr. Bennett or Mr. Kemper; and he would murmur the august title, the Reverend Mr. Bennett, savoring its syllables and finding in it a sign that no one else could compare with Uncle George.

Once at church, out of the flow of sung and spoken words that eddied around his ears while he mused on stained glass pictures of cross and crown, book and sword, and the wonderful trained lamb that carried a banner, his great-uncle's voice read out a striking phrase —"I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God, given unto me by the effectual working of his power"—and to John the words proclaimed the Reverend Mr. Bennett himself, moving about ceremoniously in flowing vestments and meekly listened to by all the grown-ups, who stood or knelt, sang or were silent, at his bidding. Out of church, when he could be thought of more easily as Uncle George again, he still seemed majestically set apart. While other men went to work in offices and shops, Uncle George remained all day in his study and its attached parlor. Fenced in there with glass-doored bookcases of tremendous proportions, attended by his black spaniel Esau, he paced back and forth through the two rooms, rehearsing his sermons in whispers that occasionally gave way to the full music of his deepest voice.

He was never in the least forbidding, though, to the small boy come visiting. He hugged him and asked a question or two and then seemed to forget him. John was left free to cut paper designs with the sharp desk scissors, or to make a cave with chairs and rugs, or to build towers with the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* and lesser materials. Gradually John learned to look into the books for pictures and then to read in them. He ranged from the ponderous leather-bound Bible with Doré's terrifying illustrations to James Whitcomb Riley's poems, and he dwelt on *The Boys of '61, Scottish Chiefs,* and *Huckleberry Finn,* with Kemble's romantic sketches. Some of the best hours were those when Uncle George had quit his pacing and whispering and the two sat reading, the little boy on the floor by one of the bookcases, the old man in his Morris chair at the window, where he could glance away from his book and gaze at his back yard of peach and cherry trees.

Sometimes, then, the old man would speak—strange ejaculations out of the ecstasy of his believing heart. Glimpses of the natural world, the seasons and sun and rain, the birds, bloom of tree and flower, the perennial leaf and grass—to him were all reminders of God's strength and mercy, manifest even in his own back yard, as everywhere. Bible verses burst from him like song, and he quoted Scripture as some people whistle, out of uncontrollable joy. Years afterward, when John's great-uncle was dead, and John himself a man so changed that it was as if, emigrating from his native land, he had forgotten the very language as well as the beliefs of his people, still in his memory phrases of that ancient Hebraic poetry would echo, and he still could see the Reverend George Bennett, white-maned and massive-shouldered, at the window, repeating old words in which he had found freshness for the hundredth time.

"'And the turtle and the crane and the swallow observe the time of their coming.' . . . Turtle means dove, my lad. Soon that robin will be eating my cherries, John. Well, from the looks of the blossoms there will be fruit enough for us all. 'He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry.' And to you and me, John. 'He hath given meat unto them that fear Him: He will ever be mindful of His covenant.' We can believe that, my boy. 'I am like a green olive tree in the house of God: my trust is in the tender mercy of God for ever and ever.'"

The text was a favorite, and the image became a symbol. Accustomed by Bible verses to figurative language, John was pleased to think of his uncle George as a green olive tree. It sounded sturdy and prolific of kindly fruit, with a suggestion of comfortable shade for a small boy. Its strangeness was proper too; Uncle George was unique among men as an olive tree would have been among the back-yard cherries.

Later, enlarging memory with a man's knowledge, John saw that his great-uncle George must have been one of the happiest of persons, that there in his study, meditating on his sermons, he had led a most eventful life, absorbed in the drama of humanity's redemption, proud of his rôle in it, and looking with confidence to its denouement. Out of the dry leaves of his theological tomes he distilled fragrant sentiments that pervaded every cranny of his day. In this dream he lived, effortlessly and with zest, like a gull in the air. So, to the boy his uncle George, in spite of his trances and rhapsodies, had never seemed like a wizard in a cave, but jolly and companionable, even when they sat together silently, both reading. And if Uncle George looked up and said, in tones like big bells, "John, my lad, life is indeed a pilgrimage; we are sojourners, as were our fathers," the boy was not oppressed, but felt intimations of adventure, like a crusader.

There were other times, and these were the very best, when Uncle George felt in the mood for playing. Often then he would draw pictures for John, strange amorphous pencil sketches, with wavering lines and a kind of withered look, as if the subjects—usually animals—had got soaking wet and had shrunk. Sometimes the two ran races from the east wall of the parlor to the west window in the study and back again, with Esau barking about their feet. Such exertions always brought refreshments out of the mysterious built-in cupboard with solid doors; its dark shelves supplied bologna for the dog, crackers and apples for the boy, crackers and port for the old man. After such a celebration the spaniel, an obedient creature alert to his master's ways, went unbidden to his place under the big desk, and the old man, preparing to soar again into his studies, sent John home with a hug and a kindly admonition to be a good boy.

"Be a good boy!" Solemnly his elders all urged it upon him. They made the issue seem desperate. Someone called the Tempter, infinitely subtle, skilled, and wicked, was said to be stalking his human victims every hour. There was no hope of escape unless God lent a hand. That was really what made the Reverend Mr. George Hancock Bennett so important; his was the voice proclaiming God's intervention on man's side. People went to church to receive this assurance, and John noticed that their sobriety at prayers was succeeded by a pretty comfortable look as they came out to resume the contest with the Tempter in the arena of this world.

To John, the Tempter remained more of a mystery than anything else, and John's attitude was more of curiosity than of fear. As he galloped along the grass, in and out around the trees between curb and sidewalk on his solitary, perilous way through the deep woods to and from school, it was the villains of literature and not the Tempter who lurked in ambush. The ghastly blind Pew, out of *Treasure Island,* gave the boy many a bad night, but not so the Tempter. Once, indeed, John was bold enough to try to force the issue with the evasive Spirit of Evil. He manufactured dozens of cheesecloth pennants tacked to sticks and set them all out in martial ranks across Uncle George's back yard to fight the Devil. He had no doubt of victory, with God over all and Uncle George right there in his study just beyond the cherry trees. After three days of waiting, he decided he had been foolish to expect a personal appearance of man's awful adversary, and he frugally converted the occasion into a King Arthur tournament. But as he knocked an empty barrel about the yard with his pennanted clothes pole, he was sure he could have downed the Tempter just as easily.

The Tempter, too, must have known he was no match for John and God and Uncle George. No doubt that was why he shunned all open conflict. John had heard of no personal appearance later than the one at which Martin Luther threw the bottle of ink, and that he knew was some years ago, even before Uncle George was born. He had seen a picture of somebody called St. Dunstan detaining the Devil by the nose with red-hot tongs, but that, too, was before Uncle George's time. John grappled with the rumor that the skulking Tempter now did his work in more ghostly ways. To the boy this was plainly unsporting, and he began to understand why grown-ups were so concerned. Such a sneak was to be doubly feared. But though he watched hard, John couldn't detect the Tempter trying any of his tricks on him; and so he decided not to worry about the Spirit of Evil until he had cause.

The boy's tenth Christmas, having just passed, was still heavy in his memory, like a large pudding conglomerate of candy, nuts, and roast turkey, of gifts to be unwrapped and tides of visitors, and at the very center the dreamy mystery of a midnight church service at which Uncle George had spoken in so soft a voice of the child asleep in a manger that drowsy John had wondered if indeed the infant Jesus might not be there in the crib under the Christmas tree. Now another feast was at hand—New Year's Day. It was a church day for Uncle George, and banks and stores would be closed so that people could come and pray. However, this holiday seemed eclipsed by New Year's Eve. At John's house there was to be a party. The big punch bowl had been set out that afternoon, with its brood of little glasses crowded about it. A room was being cleared for dancing; complex preparations were going forward in the pantry. John was encouraged to get out from under foot and go pay Uncle George a visit.

Although it was scarcely more than mid-afternoon, the sky was muffled in mists, and daylight had begun to fade. John couldn't gallop horseback through the wild woods between sidewalk and curb, for the snow had been heaped up there, but in places where the piles were higher than his head he traversed bleak wind-swept mountain passes on foot, sustaining himself by gnawing on pemmican, having providently filled a pocket with hard Christmas candies. Uncle George was sitting by the fireplace in his parlor, reading. He laid down his book, kissed John's cold, rosy cheek, and as he asked how John was and how his parents were, he smoothed the boy's rumpled hair with a gentle hand.

"Shall we draw some pictures?" he suggested.

John smiled and nodded, pleased to find him in the mood for playing. Uncle George threw a big log on the fire, went to his desk in the study, and returned with two tablets of unlined paper and two sharpened pencils. John preferred to sit on the arm of the chair and watch Uncle George draw. He knew just what to expect, but he liked to see the sketches take form. Years later he could still remember the mysterious thrill that crept over him when the familiar appeared as if magically out of the void of white paper under Uncle George's pencil.

"Horses," he demanded, and the pencil began producing them, a whole herd, all clumsy and bluntly curved like animal crackers.

"Such excellent horses must have a good barn," said Uncle George, while his pencil erected a wavering structure without a straight line or a genuine angle in it.

"Once I rode one of my father's young horses up from the far pasture, with only a halter," said Uncle George, as he put windows like portholes into the barn. "He ran away with me and galloped in through a low door—a door like this. If I hadn't flattened myself on his back, I would have been knocked off. I might have been killed."

"But you weren't," said John, triumphantly. "You knew what to do."

"God's hand is over us all," said Uncle George.

"Now a house," John demanded.

"My father's old farmhouse was like this," said Uncle George, sketching a rambling structure that looked as if it were melting at all the corners. "We boys slept up here, in an unfinished attic. Father was going to finish it one year, but we asked him not to—we liked it as it was. The snow would sift through the cracks and pile up on our beds."

"Didn't you get awfully cold?" John suggested.

"No, we were used to it," said Uncle George. "Why, my brothers and I used to dare each other by running once or twice or even three times around the house in our bare feet in the snow."

"Didn't you ever catch cold?" asked John, in awe.

"Not that I remember," said Uncle George.

"Maybe God protected you," John said.

"No doubt He did, my boy, no doubt He did," Uncle George murmured.

He laid aside the tablet, and rose and poked the fire. Then he walked out through the study and gazed at the trees in his yard, shadowy now in the dusk.

" 'Unwarmed by any sunset light, the grey day darkened into night,' " he quoted. " 'I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.' 'O, teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.' "

He turned from the window and began to pace back and forth through the rooms, his hands stuffed into his jacket pockets, his face relaxed in meditation. The boy knelt on the hearth and played the game of snatching half-burned bits out of the fire and throwing them into its center.

"John," said the old man abruptly, while he still walked back and forth, "these are the last hours of the old year. The year is dying in the night. Soon it will be gone forever; we shall never see any of its days again."

All at once John seemed to see the calendar leaves pieced together and stretched out corpse-like—with last February's deep snows and the sleigh-ride party on Washington's birthday, the young green leaves of last April when he and his playmates had fished the creek for shiners, the sultry Fourth of July with its splendid racket and stench of gunpowder, the cool nights last September when he had felt winged with life as he ran playing go-sheepie-go on the shadowy sidewalks, the gathered relatives last Thanksgiving feasting on turkey along the lengthened table, his pretty cousins Louise and Helen there to play with afterward, and the recent ecstasy of Christmas, a memory not yet a week old—all this, Uncle George was telling him, was gone forever, and he would never see any of it again. And Uncle George went on, stalking back and forth, talking solemnly in deep tones.

"Perhaps some of the days gone by, if they could come back, would reproach us for things left undone that we ought to have done, for things done that we ought not to have done."

John saw the pale dead days that were forever gone stretching white hands beseechingly to the miserable sinners who had misused them; and he felt, with a sudden pain in his throat, that he had not loved the old year enough.

"But those days cannot come again," said Uncle George. "They are gone forever. 'As soon as thou scatterest them, they are even as a sleep, and fade away suddenly like the grass.' As the grass is renewed, John, so other days come on, but the old days that have gone are gone forever."

Like an avalanche the weight of mortality fell all at once upon the small boy crouched there on the hearth by the wasting fire. The sands of time ran hissing to his ears, and shivering he heard a dark whetstone on a ghostly scythe. He had been warned of evil; now the knowledge of it confronted him, and he saw Time, for all his fatherly guise, as a relentless foe. All that the boy had heard about eternity, all that golden and musical dream of glorious courts timeless under an everlasting light, into which all was to be gathered up forever, faded away under the knowledge that things were, and then they were not, and that they could never be found again. Tears ran down his cheeks, and he began to sob.

The old man looked surprised and a bit alarmed. Quickly he knelt on the hearth beside the boy and put an arm about him.

"There, there, my lad," he consoled him, "you mustn't take it too hard. Don't break your heart regretting what is past; just resolve cheerfully by God's help to do differently in the new year."

But the thoughts of boyhood, fluttering bat-like, erratic, shadowy, and weak of sight, dared not invade the clear daylight of the old man's self-assurance. John knew he could never explain to his uncle George what he himself felt so dimly, although so deeply, that he only wanted to go back into the old year and do the same things again in the same way, not to go forward into the new year to do differently and to dishonor, by forgetting them, the old days that had been so sweet.

"I'll go home now, Uncle George," he said, getting up with a look of grave resolution. "I'm all right."

"Of course you're all right," said the old man, smiling as if to prove his words; but he followed the boy closely to the door and helped him with his coat and hat.

"Now don't worry, John," he told him, in the mellowest of voices. "Just resolve to do your best, and the new year will be a blessed and joyous one for you."

The boy kept his eyes averted, conscious of an unavoidable burden of duplicity.

"Good-bye, Uncle George," he said, and slipped out through the door the old man held open for him.

"Good-bye, my lad," said the old man, patting his head quickly as he passed. "Happy New Year, John."

The boy walked home soberly. He played no games on the way. The dim thoughts froze slowly into a hard pain, and tears froze on his cheeks. He wiped the tears away.

Outside his house he stopped to look. He must remember—as long as he could; not forever, no, but as long as he lived—how it all was, the big assuring bulk of the house, the glow of light through the shutter chinks, the friendly width of the front door. Then before he went in he pulled off one mitten and laid his hand softly on the cold snow, because under the suns of the new year those myriad crystals would melt and be no more.

THE TROUT MAP

Allen Tate

The Management Area of Cherokee
National Forest, interested in fish,
Has mapped Tellico and Bald Rivers
And North River, with the tributaries
Brookshire Branch and Sugar Cove Creek:
A fishy map for facile fishery.

Now consider it: nicely drawn in two
Colors, blue and red; blue for the hue
Of Europe (Tennessee water is green),
Red lines by blue streams to warn
The fancy-fishmen from protected fish;
Black borders hold the Area in a cracked dish.

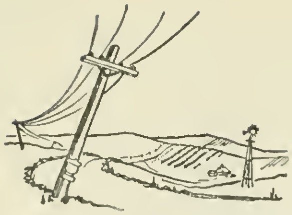
Other black lines, the dots and dashes, wire
The fisher's will through classic laurel
Over boar tracks to foamy pot-holes lying
Under Bald falls that thump the buying
Trout: we sold Professor, Brown Hackle, Worms.
Tom Bagley and I were dotted and dashed wills.

Up Green Cove Gap from Preacher Millsaps' cabin
We walked an hour confident of victory,
Went to the west down a trail that led us
To Bald River—here map and scene were one
In scene-identity. Eight trout is the story
In three miles. We came to a rock bridge

On which the road went left around a hill,
The river, right, tumbled into a cove;
But the map dashed the road along the stream
And we dotted man's fishiest enthymeme
With jellied feet upon deductive love
Of what eyes see not, that nourishes the will:

We were fishers, weren't we? And tried to fish
The egoed belly's dry cartograph—
Which made the government fish lie down and laugh;
Tommy and I listened, we heard them shake
Mountains and cove because the map was fake.
After eighteen miles our feet were clownish;

Then darkness took us into wheezing straits
Where coarse Magellan, idling with his fates,
Ran with the gulls for map around the Horn,
Or wheresoever the mind with tidy scorn
Revisits the world to hear an eagle scream
Vertigo! Mapless, the mountains were a dream.



A Partnership With Death

Vardis Fisher

EUNICE looked at me across the table and said: "I've a corking idea for a novel. I'd like to know what you think of it."

The three of us were sitting in a small club, drinking bad Saratoga cocktails. They contained too much bitters and poor vermouth. I emptied my glass and said: "All right, let's have it."

"It's not at all like anything I've ever done," she said.

Eunice Ward was a novelist, but unlike many women who write books she was not masculine in her habits and tastes. She was small and dark and shapely; and it had always seemed to me a bit incongruous that such a petite woman should write such huge tomes. None of her novels, of which there had been a half-dozen, ran under six hundred pages, and they were big gawky amorphous things like the works of Dreiser. You would expect a small and shy and introverted person like Eunice to write books no bigger than Robert Nathan's. She didn't weigh a hundred pounds, and everything about her, including her gestures, was delicate.

"Tell him," her husband said. "I've heard this story a thousand times, but I guess I can stand it again."

Paul Ward was a professor of economics on a famous Eastern campus. He was a big Viking of a man with fierce blue eyes and a way of snorting as if to blow obstacles out of his path. In all respects he was unlike his wife. Paul was lusty and lean and broad, and as extroverted as they come. Psychology, I had learned long ago, he held in withering contempt.

"Well," said Eunice, opening wide her dark eyes and looking as if the story slightly terrified her, "it's strange but it's true. I mean it really happened. I knew the woman. I still know her—but perhaps not so well as Paul does." She looked at Paul when she said that and I thought her eyes accused him.

"You mean she's still alive."

"Her kind never dies," said Paul. "It's the husbands who die. Out in Idaho don't you have a Lady Bluebeard?"

"Oh, yes, indeed—and a very notorious one."

"How many husbands did she kill?"

"She was convicted for only one murder, I think, but it's generally assumed that she laid away a half-dozen or so."

"Why drag in that case?" Eunice asked Paul. "This woman did not kill her husbands. They just died."

"How many?"

"Four."

"Four husbands died on her? It sounds as if you have a story there."

"It's a wonderful story."

I realized at once that it had taken hold of her. Authors write most of their stories as a job, but now and then they fall upon one that they must write because they cannot forget it or because in some way it seems to offer an interpretation of themselves.

"This woman," said Eunice gravely, "is a good woman."

"She just had bad luck," said Paul dryly.

"She's a good woman," said Eunice. "She's sweet and generous and kind—just the sort who should have babies and make a home."

"Didn't she have any babies?"

"No, she couldn't."

"Did she blame the husbands? Women often do."

"Sometimes the husbands are to blame. There are sterile men, you know."

"Yes, of course. But four in a row, do you think?"

"Hardly. This woman was the sterile one in this case."

"I didn't mean to interrupt," I said. "Go on with the story."

"Well, the woman has married again. When I learned she had married the fifth time I began to think about her and wonder how she felt. That—that's the story."

"I don't believe it," said Paul. "This one will die and she'll marry a sixth one." Paul looked around him and I saw his gaze dwelling on a very luscious blonde.

"How old is this woman now?"

"About forty. She was young when she married the first time—only fifteen, I think."

"Does that have anything to do with the case?"

"Eunice insists she's a good woman," said Paul. "She loves good women. If this one lost four husbands in twenty-five years, that's not so bad as four in twenty years."

To me the case seemed a little ridiculous. "How many years of marriage were allotted to each?" Eunice's glance rebuked me. "You have here," I went on hastily, "a psychological story. It's an almost incredible story to begin with. Now if each husband had about the same number of years—"

"As a matter of fact, they did."

"Then that makes it all the more incredible. You mean each had about five or six years? How long a time passed after the death of each before she married again?"

"Not long," said Paul. "She was always on the job."

"Never mind that," said Eunice impatiently. "I'm interested in how she feels now. What is her attitude toward her fifth husband going to be? It seems to me that is the heart of the story."

"That's right. Well, you do have a story there."

"It is all laid out for me up to the fifth marriage. From there on out I'm on my own. The meat of the story is what happens in the fifth marriage."

"Or the tenth," said Paul, and emptied his drink.

"It has swell possibilities. I'd like to know what the fifth husband thinks."

"Yes," said Paul. "What does that poor bastard *feel?* I'd say it's his story."

"It could be," Eunice admitted. "Should it be his story or her story?"

"Doesn't that depend on the two persons? Which is the more important, the more sensitive? Let's have more about this woman and this husband. How old is he?"

"In his forties."

"Then she's not the kind who marries men younger than herself."

"One of them was. He just happened to be."

"Is this fifth husband intelligent?"

"He's a lot like Paul," said Eunice.

"Draw your own conclusion," said Paul. In a very obvious way he was interested in a young blonde standing at the bar.

"Tell me about the woman first. She must be attractive."

"In a way. She's the warm and motherly sort that a lot of men go for. She's a little stout now but not unattractively so. She's very healthy and has a very fair skin."

"How intelligent?"

"Average. She's a high-school graduate."

"Are you sure she didn't poison these four men?"

Eunice's black eyes flashed. "Of course not. And for the purpose of my book she certainly did not."

I turned to Paul. "How well do you know this woman?"

"I've seen her a lot of times."

"You think—"

"Oh, hell, no. There's no murder in the case."

"Well," I said, "let's have another drink and proceed." We had another round, and a second and a third, and I could see the effect of them in Paul's eyes; but there was no change in Eunice except that she talked a little more freely. She sketched in the background. This much-married woman—whom we shall call Jane—appeared to be a very average and lovable sort that men liked and trusted. Her four husbands had been average men. One of them had been killed in an automobile accident. One had died of cancer of the liver, and one of a bad heart weakened by childhood rheumatism. Eunice did not know what the fourth had died of, but it was some common ailment.

"The one younger than Jane," I asked curiously, "what did he die of?"

"He was killed," said Paul. "He was drunk."

"Was his wife with him?"

"No."

"Well, I guess I'll have to assume that the woman didn't murder any of them. In writing this story are you going to tell about her life with the first four?"

"Just sketch it in. That's not important."

"It might be. Four husbands ought to make something interesting of any woman. Which one did she love most and why?"

"She loves all men," said Paul. "She's that kind."

"The story," said Eunice a little impatiently, "is about the fifth marriage."

"That's right," Paul said. "What happens to the poor bastard? Does he die too?"

"Does he die too?" asked Eunice, looking at me. "Won't Jane expect him to die?"

"Oh, not at once. He should have five or six years."

"But as the end of that time approaches, how will Jane feel? Won't she be afraid she will lose him?"

"You see," said Paul wearily, "Eunice must find some significance in this. She's not content to let people marry and die. To die or not to die, that's the point."

"I begin to feel a lot of sympathy for the fifth husband. What's his name?"

"Osberg," said Paul. "He's a Dane."

"Suppose you let Osberg live to be ninety," I said to Eunice. "Would that spoil your story?"

"That's one kind of story. Is that the biggest story?"

"You see!" cried Paul triumphantly. "She doesn't mind killing Osberg to get a big story."

Eunice shrugged. Her husband didn't take her career very seriously. I've never known any husband of a woman author who did not seem to be on the defensive against her.

"You have written psychological novels," Eunice said to me. "How would you work this story out?"

"Do you want me to be serious?"

"If you can be." There was somber mirth in her dark eyes when she added: "Don't let the wanton slaughter of husbands outrage your ego. The story is the thing. One of the great Russians should have done it—or a Frenchman."

"Well, this woman Jane is healthy, attractive, womanly, and childless. Has she had any lovers during her married life?" The response to the question startled me. Paul kicked me under the table.

"I couldn't imagine it," said Eunice tartly. "Four—"

"But she is barren," I said, avoiding Paul's eyes. "There's a problem in psychology—especially with women of average intelligence. I've known such women. They're pretty easy with their favors. It's not because they are wanton. The frustrated maternal hunger in them turns to the grown-up boys. Furthermore, you admit that Jane is healthy and vivid and that men go for her."

"Even if she had lovers, what does that have to do with it?"

Paul kicked me again under the table. Had he been one of Jane's lovers? I knew the big handsome cuss was death on women—and especially giddy women who measure men in the breadth of their shoulders and the line of their jaw.

"You're going to make this the woman's story, aren't you? Now if she was naturally the easy sort when young, her terrible mortality in husbands would make her all the more approachable, wouldn't it?"

"It might work the other way."

"Maybe, with a woman like you."

I intended that remark to be innocent, but I thought I saw Eunice catch her breath. She looked at me, and in her black eyes there was, at least for an instant, the naked meaning of her if I had had the power to read it. Paul turned away and was looking at a couple dancing. I ordered another round of drinks.

"Well, let's skip the erotic life." An idea came to me. "Let's dance," I said.

Eunice was an excellent dancer but a little stiff. I suppose most women are who write books—and most men too. While we danced I had intended to talk to her, free of Paul's caustic interruptions and kicks under the table; but almost at once I observed that she was watching her husband. He did not know it, and probably would not have cared if he had known. Several couples were dancing, and I became aware of Eunice's intent gaze on her husband when she began to lead me. I became curious about her motive, and I observed next that Paul was staring, in the bold and unashamed way of extroverts, at the blonde. Then I understood that Eunice was maneuvering the dance so that she could watch her husband.

"About this story," I said, looking down across her dark lashes and noting the direction of her gaze. "As I understand it, you want to write a novel about Jane's attitude toward her fifth husband. It could be a swell story. Does she mother him to death and constantly watch over him, or does she—"

"What?" asked Eunice, looking up.

"What else could she do?"

"I don't know."

"She might want him to die." At once I felt a change in her. She stiffened and raised a hand to do something with her hair.

"Why did you say that?" she asked, and there was such passion in her voice that I was startled.

"Well, she might. If you want a psychological story . . ."

The music stopped and we returned to the table. Paul had gone over to the bar and was standing there with his back to us. He was a handsome figure of a man—two hundred pounds of firm meat and bone without a bit of fat on him. When I turned to Eunice I caught her looking at the blonde.

"She probably would want him to die," I said. "The possibilities there are enormous. She has had four husbands who have died, and in consequence she has developed an attitude toward the men she marries. Not fatalism, you think? It could be that, but it could be something subtler. It could be—"

"What?" asked Eunice. She was again in superb control of herself. Her voice was casual and her eyes were an inscrutable black.

"It could be a kind of subconscious and satanic artistry. After four, the woman has come to accept the death of her husband as inevitable. Death has become the fixed pattern of her life. She finds a part of her meaning in it, and the ways in which she finds that meaning make the story. I mean that she, so vitally alive, has entered a kind of strange partnership with death. Or don't you think so?"

"I like to hear you talk," Eunice said calmly. "Go on."

When the music started up, Paul headed straight for the blonde. A few moments later he was dancing with her. They were both good dancers and they made a handsome pair.

"Shall we dance or talk about the story?"

"I like to hear you talk."

"I'm a little drunk," I said. "I'm afraid I'm not talking very well. Suppose we pursue that possibility. Jane, a good woman, could never consciously wish for the death of her husband. Could she? But subconsciously she could plot it. Naturally, after a few years she would expect him to die because all the others had died; and if he didn't die she would be confused. I suppose that, having lost four husbands, she has become rather self-pitying and neurotic, hasn't she? Life is cruel for her through no fault of her own. But she is a brave and self-sacrificing and uncomplaining woman. She has learned to feed on the tragic. That's the meaning of her life and she couldn't very well reconcile herself to a husband who threatened to outlive her.

"I once knew a woman who lost all her babies. One after another died in infancy. After four or five—I don't remember how many—had died, the woman came to be regarded as a very tragic person. She thought of herself that way too and learned to thrive on misfortune.

For her it was all a part of God's wise and inscrutable plan. She got a lot of attention and sympathy that she would have never got if her babies had lived. In fact, she reached the point where she fully expected the next one to die, and spoke of its death as something imminent and inevitable. Even more than that. As soon as the infant was born she began to search it for signs of sickness; and right from the start she told the neighbors how ailing it was, and fondly dwelt on all the imaginary symptoms.

"There's a story like the one you have in mind. This devout and superstitious woman never for a moment blamed herself or wondered about syphillis or anything else. Nor did her neighbors. It was God's doings and that's all there was to it. But persons try to turn even misfortune into an advantage and she did; and she became the best-known and most talked of woman in her county.

"Now suppose her sixth child, say, had lived. Would the mother have had a nervous breakdown? I suspect she would have had. If all the grave attention of her neighbors had been suspended, what meaning would her life have had then? It would be like making a new start after emotional bankruptcy. She would no longer have been the one woman in the county singled out by God for a special and mysterious dispensation. If a child or two had lived and romped about in health, this woman might easily have gone insane.

"Because, after all, Eunice, we are interested in attention and sympathy and in being set apart. We are so hungry for those things that some people contrive misfortune in order to get them. That's the psychology of the cripple who becomes the brave and cheerful person in his community; of the wife who gets the attention of her husband and doctors by becoming neurotically ill; of the tantrum child who throws himself on the floor. That's the psychology of a Hitler, bedeviled by feelings of physical and social inferiority, who sets out on mass murder to make the whole world pay attention to him. It's a terrible thing in human beings but it is there—in all of us.

"It must be in this woman Jane. But how can she bring about the death of her husband in order to keep the role as the tragic wife? Have you figured that out?"

"No," said Eunice in a low voice. "I guess I hadn't thought of the story that way."

Paul had finished the dance and returned to the bar and I went over to fetch him. When he sat at the table I said:

"We have this novel doped out. We've decided that Jane cannot live happily unless her fifth husband dies; but she's a virtuous woman. She can't poison him or shoot him. She has to bring about his death in a way that will leave her conscience clear. How can she do it? Is he a neurotic man?"

"Hell, no," Paul said.

"Then she can't drive him into chronic illness. Besides, a neurotic illness often hangs on to the snow-white years. Could there be an accident? Jane does tender and thoughtful things to preserve her husband, but all the while, unknown to her, they are calculated to finish him off. Could she make some change in the house so he would fall and break his neck?"

"I'm afraid," said Paul, "she is going to have a hell of a time getting rid of him."

I looked at Eunice. She was watching me closely, but she did not speak.

"I have it," I said. "Jane is a patriotic woman. We're at war. She persuades her husband to enlist."

"A lot of soldiers will come back," Paul said.

"Well, we'll put him in the most dangerous service—in aviation, of course. The chances are against him there."

"We must be sure to kill him," Paul said. "If we don't, Eunice will have to rewrite her damned story."

I became aware that Eunice was upset. She rose abruptly and asked me to dance; and when we were on the floor, she said:

"Did you have to say that?"

"What?"

"About aviation. Didn't you know that Paul has enlisted in aviation?"

"Lord, no! Really, has he? In the combat part?"

"Yes."

I looked around for Paul. He was dancing again with the blonde. When Eunice looked up at me I saw tears in her eyes.

"I tried to keep him from enlisting," she said.

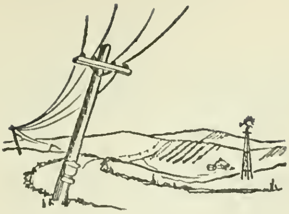
"Of course you did."

"College teachers don't have to go. He was deferred."

"Yes, of course."

"When he insisted, I tried to get him to enter a noncombat division."

"Of course you did," I said. Then suddenly a thought came to me and I dropped the subject.



Arkansas

Raymond Weeks

THIS is not a story. It is not a history. It is a fact. One cannot say that Arkansas belonged to Alphonse Jaccard or that Alphonse belonged to her. They belonged to each other. In all the annals of Jackson County there is no record of a more mutual affection or of a more mysterious end. A few of the oldest inhabitants still remember their close union, their constant companionship, their disappearance in a blaze of glory.

It all began at the County Fair. The Martin hogs had won all the first prizes except one, while the Jaccard hogs had received only seconds. Tom Martin began all the trouble. As he stood looking at his blue-ribboned grunters he declared:

"In the matter of pigs we can beat the world."

Now, this was wrong of Tom. We ought to be modest in victory. Alphonse Jaccard spoke up:

"Hum! anybody can raise fat hogs! As for speed and sense, your hogs ain't nowhere!"

In judging this remark of Alphonse, you should bear in mind the long line of Jaccards and their glorious record: The walls of their parlor were hung with blue ribbons. Since the death of old Mr. Jaccard four years before, the eclipse of the family had begun. Not that no ambitious Jaccards were left; there were plenty of them—five sons and four daughters, all reared in veneration of the past. But victory avoided them. For three consecutive seasons the County Fair had left the Jaccards broken in spirit, baffled. They returned home in silence and hardly spoke all winter. They did not love one another less for their misfortunes—only, what use was there for words? Would they bring back lost glory? So you will understand Alphonse; you will understand him and sympathize with him when he said:

"Hum! anybody can raise fat hogs! As for speed and sense, your hogs ain't nowhere!"

Tom Martin answered insolently:

"I'll run my pigs against yourn this minute or at the next fair!"

And Alphonse Jaccard replied:

"Next fair, so be it! A race of yearlings!"

Thus was the gauntlet thrown down in the presence of bearded men and breathless women.

Excitement spread throughout Linwood, throughout the county. Two days later, neighbors came to the Jaccard farm to talk with Alphonse. They learned that he had gone, nor would the family say where. Tom Martin declared that Alphonse had left the country for good. But just wait, Tom! Wait and watch. Fate has something in store for you! One cannot forever trample upon the unfortunate.

Now of course you wonder where Alphonse was. Where do you suppose? Five days after the close of the County Fair he was riding Bonny, his best saddle horse, through the valleys of Arkansas! That's speed for you! The valleys did not delay him long. His proud spirit was not looking for valleys, but pigs. He made for the mountains. Nothing stopped him, neither fine cooking nor beautiful maidens nor enchanting scenery. He rode with set features and indifferent eye.

People marveled at this cold, handsome young man from the north country. His bearing, his horse and saddle, and the three hounds that accompanied him, bespoke the gentleman. Perhaps he was a fugitive from justice? Yes, that must be it! Brave men admired him, soft-eyed women sighed when he had passed. The whole State of Arkansas was his for the asking. But it was not the State of Arkansas that Alphonse wanted!

Among the cone-like small mountains of Arkansas live, as you of course know, the famous wild pigs of America. These noble beasts formerly possessed the entire northern continent. They held their own against the Indians, but the Pale Faces, with their cruel and treacherous firearms, forced them slowly into the mountain fastness of Arkansas. The pigs would never have yielded in fair fight, but their generous nature hates treachery and cowardice. They retired, therefore, more through contempt than fear.

Travelers and scientists who want to study the pig under conditions approaching, though not equaling, his former splendor, are accustomed to go to Arkansas. There they see him master of a wild and beautiful domain, all of whose peaks and valleys, rivers and lakes, caverns, forests, paths, thickets and lairs are as familiar to him as your pockets are to you. In his architecture he differs notably from the degenerate brutes called pigs which have been imported from Europe. He is long, thin, wiry, made of bones, nerves and muscles. He can run so fast as to make a dog seem a turtle. Accordingly, if he runs from dogs, as he sometimes does, it is purely out of love of running. At any moment he can turn around and shake any dog into thistledown. His sense of hearing is as remarkable as his sense of sight. His intelligence is as great as his beauty. In short, he is a pig that is a pig!

It will never be known how Alphonse managed to capture a sucking pig of this illustrious stock. That he did so and escaped alive is proof that he was a hero. He always refused to tell how he did it. We can only imagine his seizure of the tiny treasure, its squeals, his mad flight to where his horse waited, the pursuit through the mountain fastnesses of two hundred indignant and infuriated relatives of the victim, their cries and grunts and oaths and snorts and jibberings, the labored breathing of the horse fleeing from death and horror! No other man ever accomplished such a feat. The bones of many who tried it are preserved as trophies by the pigs of Arkansas.

No sow ever cared for her baby with greater tenderness than Alphonse for his little prisoner. He carried it at first in his bosom, later on a soft bed of cotton in a sack which he hung from his neck. He stopped at every cabin and house to give it warm milk, and taught it to drink from a bottle. He petted it and talked to it for hours as he rode. The little thing wept for days and called for its mama. At last, however, it began to nestle close to his body, especially at nightfall. Alphonse sang it to sleep with old French songs which he had learned from his mother.

What saved the life of the captured baby was not so much the care which it received as the affection back of that care, for Alphonse, when he had definitely escaped from his pursuers and had been able to look at and to fondle his captive, felt that it was the most intelligent and lovable little creature in the world. Accordingly, he loved it with what proved to be the passion of his life. They both longed for sympathy and love. They were made for each other.

Not until he had crossed the frontier into Missouri did Alphonse feel safe from pursuit and arrest at the hands of the Governor of Arkansas. What a relief to reach his native state, to be able to caress and look freely at the baby pig! He took it out from its sack, petted its curly brown hair, its silky ears, pressed it against his cheek and neck. He noted in detail its beauty, looked into its deep, intelligent eyes and, transported out of himself, he felt that only one name would fit the lovely creature: He named her Arkansas!

There was a memorable scene one night at the Jaccard house. The family had just finished supper when the beat of hoofs was heard coming rapidly. They all rushed to the door with one name on their lips. Alphonse arrived, tossed the rein to the hired man, got down from the saddle with care, holding something in his arms, caressed an instant with one hand the face of his faithful Bonny, and hurried into the house. He embraced all the family, motioned to have the door and window blinds closed, then drew tenderly from the sack the mite of a piglet and exclaimed in French:

"This is Miss Arkansas! Long life to her!"

He sat down and held her in his arms. The family crowded around. For a few moments Arkansas lay there blinking at the light and the strange faces; then she closed her eyes and tried to bury herself in Alphonse's bosom. He pressed her to his neck and cheek, humming the low song that she knew best. She did not squeal, as vulgar pigs do, but uttered a sweet little plaint, interrupted by tiny sobs, while a tear rolled from each eye. She was thinking of her mama, her brothers and sisters, and brave family in the Far Country.

Needless to say, Arkansas slept that night and for many weeks in a snug box, close by Alphonse's bed. He gave her warm milk and tended her like a sick infant. If any one had suggested fixing a place for her in one of the stables, Alphonse would have said to him: "Go there yourself!"

I will not delay you with a long account of Arkansas' education, although the subject would prove of interest to pedagogues. Let it suffice to give a few details. At the age of less than three weeks, she knew how to eat from a bowl without putting her feet in it. She had inherited all of the native neatness of the pigs of Arkansas. Her feet and skin she kept immaculate, which added to her beauty, for she had a lovely clear pink complexion. By the time she was a month old, she understood French perfectly and could already speak several words, such as: "Hein?", which means: "Excuse me, Sir [or Madam], what did you say?" Or: "Allons!", which means: "If you have no objection, Sir [or Madam], let us start." Could you have done as well at the age of one month? She also knew how to distinguish from the sound of the horn the different meals—breakfast, dinner, supper. While not expansive toward visitors, she received them with courtesy and was equally polite to all. She soon began to pick up English and in time understood it quite well, though she naturally preferred French and her own language.

From the first, Arkansas was a prime favorite. The dogs idolized her. They used to run to her and kiss her good morning. They played hide-and-seek and tag with her. It was a delight to watch these games. She enjoyed almost equal popularity with the cats, chickens, ducks, geese, horses, cows, and mules. They all regarded her as a princess.

But Arkansas' great favorite, her sunlight and her comfort, was, and remained, Alphonse! She worshipped him. She followed him all over the farm, keeping close behind him and talking to him almost continuously. Before she was two months old, he had taught her to start running at a signal and to return at another. Her progress was rapid.

There was on the farm only one animal with which Arkansas refused to have anything to do, and that was the pigs. She despised and hated them as coarse, swollen, dirty, loathsome, degenerate caricatures of a noble race. She never went into their lot nor paid any attention to them, although they often spoke to her through the fence.

Winter passed, spring, midsummer. September arrived, the month of the great trial! The heart of Jackson County almost ceased to beat, so intense was the excitement. There were more than thirty pigs entered for the speed contest. Large wagers were put up, with the odds favoring Arkansas, partly because of her family descent and romantic history, partly because no one was more respected and beloved than the handsome, silent young man of twenty-five, who was her master, Alphonse Jaccard, whose name stood as a synonym for honesty, generosity and loyalty.

It had been the happiest year of Alphonse's life. For the last week before the great event, he had slept in the open air near Arkansas' little house. He feared trouble. Then, too, the moon was approaching full, and he had noticed that at such times Arkansas seemed to be melancholy, that she remembered then more than at other times the Far Country where her family waited for her. She did not conceal her longing from him. On the contrary, she used to lean against his leg with a soft pressure when they stood watching the full moon rise at bedtime, and she used to say, looking off to the Southland with her nose in the air: "Ah! Ah!", which was her pronunciation of Arkansas, the Far Country.

The day for the great race arrived. All of the beauty and chivalry of the county were gathered there, as well as everybody else. The farms were entirely deserted. One of the Jaccard boys had ridden Bonny over to the fair early in the day, to be sure that all arrangements had been made. Alphonse came in a big wagon with the rest of the family, including Arkansas, to whom he had carefully explained what was to take place. They planned so as to arrive only a few minutes before the race; whereas most of Arkansas' rivals had been there for days, the judges having granted permission for all entries to become acquainted with the track at times when it was not in use.

The great race was to be the final event of the afternoon. An immense throng was present, fully two thousand persons. The grandstand was packed with sturdy farmers, their red-faced wives, rosy-cheeked daughters, and brown-cheeked boys. Hundreds sat and stood in wagons or perched on the branches of trees. There was no breeze. The dust of previous races hung in a soft haze over the landscape. The squealing and grunting of the entries for the race could be heard, mingled with loud exclamations and tender cajolings of their masters and seconds.

Emotion rose to the breaking point half an hour before the race. Where was Alphonse? Where was Arkansas? The question passed from lip to lip. As for the Martins, they were there in force. Tom looked pale, as was inevitable when the reputation and the glory of the family were at stake. His father, the Major, his mother, and his sister, Bessie, tried to remain calm, but showed their nervousness.

At last the Jaccards and Arkansas arrived. The rumor spread like lightning: "They have come!" The families of the other entries turned pale. Finally, from the judges' stand came the signal: "Get ready, gentlemen!"

Then followed the loudest clamor of squeals and grunts that has ever been heard at a racecourse. The owners and attendants dragged, pulled, pushed, and drove to the track the more than thirty entries, and one is forced to admit that they—I mean the entries—were a handsome lot of porkers. Each one had a number tied about his neck and a rope to a hind foot. The rope was to be detached at the last moment, when the chief judge should cry: "One! Two! Three! Go!!!" The mob of the entries crowded to the inside of the track to get the advantage. Where so much is at stake, no precaution should be neglected.

A murmur of admiration burst from the immense throng when Alphonse and Arkansas appeared, walking side by side, she being unattached by any vile and dishonoring rope. They walked slowly, conversing as quietly as if on their farm. He was calling her his treasure, his delight, his darling, his Arkansas, and she looked up at him out of her black eyes and said: "Have no fear, Alphonse!"

She paid not the least attention to the grunting, squealing horde of her rivals, but one could see that her nose curled in contempt.

It is now necessary to mention one thing about Arkansas which I have intentionally deferred. I have more than once spoken of her beauty, which was of the purest type, but I have not stated that her two left legs were slightly shorter than their right mates. This was due to one of the peculiar habits of the Arkansas pigs. Allow me to explain.

For centuries these pigs, whose social life is most complex, have recognized the principle of private ownership of property. Each family or clan owns a hill or mountain, where its members pass their time. A member of another clan is forbidden to walk or forage on that mountain, unless by special invitation. Furthermore, the mountains are cone-shaped. But this is not all: The families or clans always walk or run around their mountain *in the same direction.* The result of this is that all Arkansas pigs, without exception, have their legs shorter on one side than on the other. Time is lacking to enlarge on this well-known fact, whose origins lie concealed behind the mists of antiquity. All Arkansas pigs are either lefters or righters, and naturally run on a curve. *Any* pig can run straight!

Now, Alphonse, with his keen intelligence, saw the bearing of this fact. He accordingly stole his prize from among the lefters: Arkansas was a lefter. You will readily see the immense advantage which her form of architecture gave her on a racecourse where the contestants had the judges, and consequently the inside of the track, on their left hand.

The fated moment arrived. The chief judge, Col. Milt McGee, proud of his role, called in a tremendous voice: "Are you ready? One! Two! Three! Go!!!" Oh! my friends, what a race was there! The squealing, squirming mob was off, launched by violent kicks. The crowd arose en masse. Their shouts shook the hills and would have been heard clear to the Missouri River, if there had been any one there to hear them. Against a background of unsurpassed beauty a great historical event was taking place. The spectators knew this. They also knew that they were present looking at it and that they knew that they were looking at it. Accordingly, their excitement and enthusiasm swept silence off the earth!

As I have said, the contestants had started in the mad race. Each one had been told to do or die. The people looked down on a surging mass of rumps, tails, and flopping ears. Never since the time of the Greeks had so much vying ambition torn along a racecourse. Never had contestants talked so much to one another as they ran, so intense was their excitement.

But, you ask, what of Arkansas? She and her master had taken their place on the outer side, in the most unfavorable position. At the moment of starting, Alphonse, who was bending over Arkansas, said in her ear: "Go, little treasure! Go, little angel!" And she went! She was built for it! Being constructed to run on a curve, she fitted the race track, and being thin—an enemy might have said too thin—her flight through the air caused almost no friction. She did not appear to be running; she seemed to glide through the air, close to the earth but not touching it and not of it. The Martins, where were they? And the other entries? They seemed to be standing still, or even running backward, when Arkansas passed them. As she swept by the grandstand on the first lap, not one of her rivals had even come into sight at the bend of the track! It was only when she passed right in front of you like a cannon ball that you could catch a glimse of little back hoofs walking on the air. She passed as a flash from a mirror would pass, yet she kept her bearings, and, as she swept by an island of French where Alphonse and the family stood, they thought they saw her wink at them!

Oh! the love of a pig! the unequaled, the magnificent Arkansas!

She ran faster and faster. When she passed by on the third and supposedly last lap she was going so rapidly that the judges' hats blew off. She knew that the race was won, but she saw in front of her the vile mob of her rivals who were almost an entire lap behind. She gave a little flirt of her hindquarters, just to signal to the judges that she knew what she was doing, and tore on around the dizzy track for a fourth time. She finished the extra lap amidst a frenzied scene of enthusiasm that shook the earth. With cries of "Arkansas! Arkansas!" the vast crowd surged over the track. But she did not hear their cries. She was in the arms of Alphonse, who was weeping like an infant. Ah! Alphonse! why did you not die that moment?

At last the judges, led by Col. McGee, forced their way to where Arkansas and the family stood. The Colonel himself wound her glorious neck with streamers of blue ribbon, while another judge tied a tuft to her tail. She received with becoming modesty these badges of victory. They all noticed that she was not breathing faster than in repose, and that she had not turned a hair. The judges also decked with blue ribbons the broad straw hat of Alphonse, the lapel of his coat, his happy mother and sisters, and even the saddle of Bonny.

The great sun went down through the golden dust and the crowd finally began to disperse. Arkansas and Alphonse had left the race track. She had leaped into the wagon unaided. Alphonse had followed and sat down by her. At that moment she beheld, pale and ghostly through the haze, the full orb of the rising moon. She was seen to whisper something into Alphonse's ear, to give him a single, tender glance, then to jump from the wagon and start off, running toward the west. Alphonse turned deathly pale. He had not only heard what she had whispered, he knew her—he knew her from the life lines on her hoofs to the hair on her back. With a mere wave of farewell to his mother, he leaped out of the wagon, unhitched Bonny, mounted her like a flash, and was gone! The assembled thousands stood spellbound. They saw Arkansas running rapidly, her blue trophies fluttering in the air. She turned her head at times to see if Alphonse was following. Indeed he was! Never had Bonny run as then, except perhaps the night when they stole the baby pig. The throng watched them breathlessly, until at the crest of a hill they saw faintly a last flutter of the blue ribbon on Alphonse's hat; then they broke as one man, rushed to the swift saddle horses, and made off in a mad pursuit of Alphonse and Arkansas.

Ride hard, brave men and courageous boys! Gallop, horses! Cut into tatters the prairies and the fields! You do not know that the flutter of blue over the hill was the last you are ever to see of the unfortunate Alphonse Jaccard! . . .

There are those who will tell you, my listeners, that this whole affair is only a dream—that it never happened. They were not present. Do not believe them!

For months tales drifted in from the Indians and traders to the west and southwest of us—tales of a phantom pig and a spectre horseman, of their furious course, of beseeching cries, songs and whistlings heard in the night. Piously and with sinking hearts we pieced together these rumors. Alas! there could be no doubt! Arkansas, running true to her architecture, had described a vast curve, which turned gradually toward the south, with all the inevitability of mathematics! Finally, an Indian brought in the hat of Alphonse, still decked, O pathos! with a piece of blue ribbon. He had found it in the direction of the Verdigris River, two hundred miles away! Then the most stupid among us understood. Arkansas had transcribed her inherited curve across the limitless prairies and desolate plains of Kansas Territory, down through the corner of Indian Territory and into her native State of Arkansas, carrying in her wake her beloved master.

CLOSING THE YEAR

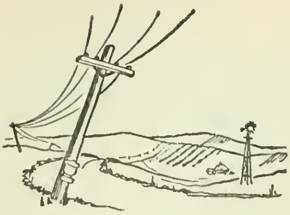
Alan Swallow

South the sun shuddered, and turned,
Making the close hounds bellow as they passed.
There in the southland the skyway burned,
And drouth stripped leaves from the tall, armed mast,

Shaped to impale the closing year.
The wide wound opened, bled, and it will heal:
Rocks crumble, and the grasses sere
Under the ruin of the aged and ageless wheel.

Here in the northland seed has run
Like snow among the hills, threaded like mice
The stubble passageways, and lain
Like living beetle in momentary ice.

What can be buried? Even the husk
Rots, and then finds the vein: and over all
Time spills incessant water, whose rush
Leaves no locked island of decent burial.



The Colt

Wallace Stegner

IT was the swift coming of spring that let things happen. It was spring, and the opening of the roads, that took his father out of town. It was spring that clogged the river with floodwater and ice pans, sent the dogs racing in wild aimless packs, ripped the railroad bridge out and scattered it down the river for exuberant townspeople to fish out piecemeal. It was spring that drove the whole town to the river bank with pike poles and coffeepots and boxes of sandwiches for an impromptu picnic, lifting their sober responsibilities out of them and making them whoop blessings on the C.P.R. for a winter's firewood. Nothing might have gone wrong except for the coming of spring. Some of the neighbors might have noticed and let them know; Bruce might not have forgotten; his mother might have remembered and sent him out again after dark.

But the spring came, and the ice went out, and that night Bruce went to bed drunk and exhausted with excitement. In the restless sleep just before waking he dreamed of wolves and wild hunts, but when he awoke finally he realized that he had not been dreaming the noise. The window, wide open for the first time in months, let in a shivery draught of fresh, damp air, and he heard the faint yelping far down in the bend of the river.

He dressed and went downstairs, crowding his bottom into the warm oven, not because he was cold but because it had been a ritual for so long that not even the sight of the sun outside could convince him it wasn't necessary. The dogs were still yapping; he heard them through the open door.

"What's the matter with all the pooches?" he said. "Where's Spot?"

"He's out with them," his mother said. "They've probably got a porcupine treed. Dogs go crazy in the spring."

"It's dog days they go crazy."

"They go crazy in the spring, too." She hummed a little as she set the table. "You'd better go feed the horses. Breakfast won't be for ten minutes. And see if Daisy is all right."

Bruce stood perfectly still in the middle of the kitchen. "Oh, my gosh!" he said. "I left Daisy picketed out all night!"

His mother's head jerked around. "Where?"

"Down in the bend."

"Where those dogs are?"

"Yes," he said, sick and afraid. "Maybe she's had her colt."

"She shouldn't for two or three days," his mother said. But just looking at her he knew that it might be bad, that there was something to be afraid of. In another moment they were both out the door, both running.

But it couldn't be Daisy they were barking at, he thought as he raced around Chance's barn. He'd picketed her higher up, not clear down in the U where the dogs were. His eyes swept the brown, wet, close-cropped meadow, the edge of the brush where the river ran close under the north bench. The mare wasn't there! He opened his mouth and half turned, running, to shout at his mother coming behind him, and then sprinted for the deep curve of the bend.

As soon as he rounded the little clump of brush that fringed the cutbank behind Chance's he saw them. The mare stood planted, a bay spot against the grey brush, and in front of her, on the ground, was another smaller spot. Six or eight dogs were leaping around, barking, sitting. Even at that distance he recognized Spot and the Chapmans' airdale.

He shouted and pumped on. At a gravelly patch he stooped and clawed and straightened, still running, with a handful of pebbles. In one pausing, straddling, aiming motion he let fly a rock at the distant pack. It fell far short, but they turned their heads, sat on their haunches and let out defiant short barks. Their tongues lolled as if they had run far.

Bruce yelled and threw again, one eye on the dogs and the other on the chestnut colt in front of the mare's feet. The mare's ears were back, and as he ran, Bruce saw the colt's head bob up and down. It was all right then. The colt was alive. He slowed and came up quietly. Never move fast or speak loud around an animal, Pa said.

The colt struggled again, raised its head with white eyeballs rolling, spraddled its white-stockinged legs and tried to stand. "Easy, boy," Bruce said. "Take it easy, old fella." His mother arrived, getting her breath, her hair half down, and he turned to her gleefully. "It's all right, Ma. They didn't hurt anything. Isn't he a beauty, Ma?"

He stroked Daisy's nose. She was heaving, her ears pricking forward and back; her flanks were lathered, and she trembled. Patting her gently, he watched the colt, sitting now like a dog on its haunches, and his happiness that nothing had really been hurt bubbled out of him. "Lookit, Ma," he said. "He's got four white socks. Can I call him Socks, Ma? He sure is a nice colt, isn't he? Aren't you, Socks, old boy?" He reached down to touch the chestnut's forelock, and the colt struggled, pulling away.

Then Bruce saw his mother's face. It was quiet, too quiet. She hadn't answered a word to all his jabber. Instead she knelt down, about ten feet from the squatting colt, and stared at it. The boy's eyes followed hers. There was something funny about. . . .

"Ma!" he said. "What's the matter with its front feet?"

He left Daisy's head and came around, staring. The colt's pasterns looked bent—*were* bent, so that they flattened clear to the ground under its weight. Frightened by Bruce's movement, the chestnut flopped and floundered to its feet, pressing close to its mother. As it walked, Bruce saw, flat on its fetlocks, its hooves sticking out in front like a movie comedian's too-large shoes.

Bruce's mother pressed her lips together, shaking her head. She moved so gently that she got her hand on the colt's poll, and he bobbed against the pleasant scratching. "You poor broken-legged thing," she said with tears in her eyes. "You poor little friendly ruined thing!"

Still quietly, she turned toward the dogs, and for the first time in his life Bruce heard her curse. Quietly, almost in a whisper, she cursed them as they sat with hanging tongues just out of reach. "God damn you," she said. "God damn your wild hearts, chasing a mother and a poor little colt."

To Bruce, standing with trembling lip, she said, "Go get Jim Enich. Tell him to bring a wagon. And don't cry. It's not your fault."

His mouth tightened; a sob jerked in his chest. He bit his lip and drew his face down tight to keep from crying, but his eyes filled and ran over.

"It is too my fault!" he said, and turned and ran.

Later, as they came in the wagon up along the cutbank, the colt tied down in the wagon box with his head sometimes lifting, sometimes bumping on the boards, the mare trotting after with chuckling vibrations of solicitude in her throat, Bruce leaned far over and tried to touch the colt's haunch. "Gee whiz!" he said. "Poor old Socks."

His mother's arm was around him, keeping him from leaning over too far. He didn't watch where they were until he heard his mother say in surprise and relief, "Why, there's Pa!"

Instantly he was terrified. He had forgotten and left Daisy staked out all night. It was his fault, the whole thing. He slid back into the seat and crouched between Enich and his mother, watching from that narrow space like a gopher from its hole. He saw the Ford against the barn and his father's big body leaning into it pulling out gunny sacks and straw. There was mud all over the car, mud on his father's pants. He crouched deeper into his crevice and watched his father's face while his mother was telling what had happened.

Then Pa and Jim Enich lifted and slid the colt down to the ground, and Pa stooped to feel its fetlocks. His face was still, red from windburn, and his big square hands were muddy. After a long examination he straightened up.

"Would've been a nice colt," he said. "Damn a pack of mangy mongrels, anyway." He brushed his pants and looked at Bruce's mother. "How come Daisy was out?"

"I told Brucie to take her out. The barn seems so cramped for her, and I thought it would do her good to stretch her legs. And then the ice went out, and the bridge with it, and there was a lot of excitement. . . ." She spoke very fast, and in her voice Bruce heard the echo of his own fear and guilt. She was trying to protect him, but in his mind he knew he was to blame.

"I didn't mean to leave her out, Pa," he said. His voice squeaked, and he swallowed. "I was going to bring her in before supper, only when the bridge. . . ."

His father's somber eyes rested on him, and he stopped. But his father didn't fly into a rage. He just seemed tired. He looked at the colt and then at Enich. "Total loss?" he said.

Enich had a leathery, withered face, with two deep creases from beside his nose to the corner of his mouth. A brown mole hid in the left one, and it emerged and disappeared as he chewed a dry grass stem. "Hide," he said.

Bruce closed his dry mouth, swallowed. "Pa!" he said. "It won't have to be shot, will it?"

"What else can you do with it?" his father said. "A crippled horse is no good. It's just plain mercy to shoot it."

"Give it to me, Pa. I'll keep it lying down and heal it up."

"Yeah," his father said, without sarcasm and without mirth. "You could keep it lying down about one hour."

Bruce's mother came up next to him, as if the two of them were standing against the others. "Jim," she said quickly, "isn't there some kind of brace you could put on it? I remember my dad had a horse once that broke a leg below the knee, and he saved it that way."

"Not much chance," Enich said. "Both legs, like that." He plucked a weed and stripped the dry branches from the stalk. "You can't make a horse understand he has to keep still."

"But wouldn't it be worth trying?" she said. "Children's bones heal so fast, I should think a colt's would too."

"I don't know. There's an outside chance, maybe."

"Bo," she said to her husband, "why don't we try it? It seems such a shame, a lovely colt like that."

"I know it's a shame!" he said. "I don't like shooting colts any better than you do. But I never saw a broken-legged colt get well. It'd just be a lot of worry and trouble, and then you'd have to shoot it finally anyway."

"Please," she said. She nodded at him slightly, and then the eyes of both were on Bruce. He felt the tears coming up again, and turned to grope for the colt's ears. It tried to struggle to its feet, and Enich put his foot on its neck. The mare chuckled anxiously.

"How much this hobble brace kind of thing cost?" the father said finally. Bruce turned again, his mouth open with hope.

"Two-three dollars, is all," Enich said.

"You think it's got a chance?"

"One in a thousand, maybe."

"All right. Let's go see MacDonald."

"Oh, good!" Bruce's mother said, and put her arm around him tight.

"I don't know whether it's good or not," the father said. "We might wish we never did it." To Bruce he said, "It's your responsibility. You got to take complete care of it."

"I will!" Bruce said. He took his hand out of his pocket and rubbed below his eye with his knuckles. "I'll take care of it every day."

Big with contrition and shame and gratitude and the sudden sense of immense responsibility, he watched his father and Enich start for the house to get a tape measure. When they were thirty feet away he said loudly, "Thanks, Pa. Thanks an awful lot."

His father half-turned, said something to Enich. Bruce stooped to stroke the colt, looked at his mother, started to laugh and felt it turn horribly into a sob. When he turned away so that his mother wouldn't notice he saw his dog Spot looking inquiringly around the corner of the barn. Spot took three or four tentative steps and paused, wagging his tail. Very slowly (never speak loud or move fast around an animal) the boy bent and found a good-sized stone. He straightened casually, brought his arm back, and threw with all his might. The rock caught Spot squarely in the ribs. He yiped, tucked his tail, and scuttled around the barn, and Bruce chased him, throwing clods and stones and gravel, yelling, "Get out! Go on, get out of here or I'll kick you apart. Get out! Go on!"

So all that spring, while the world dried in the sun and the willows emerged from the floodwater and the mud left by the freshet hardened and caked among their roots, and the grass of the meadow greened and the river brush grew misty with tiny leaves and the dandelions spread yellow along the flats, Bruce tended his colt. While the other boys roamed the bench hills with .22s looking for gophers or rabbits or sage hens, he anxiously superintended the colt's nursing and watched it learn to nibble the grass. While his gang built a darkly secret hideout in the deep brush beyond Hazards', he was currying and brushing and trimming the chestnut mane. When packs of boys ran hare and hounds through the town and around the river's slow bends, he perched on the front porch with his slingshot and a can full of small round stones, waiting for stray dogs to appear. He waged a holy war on the dogs until they learned to detour widely around his house, and he never did completely forgive his own dog, Spot. His whole life was wrapped up in the hobbled, leg-ironed chestnut colt with the slow-motion lunging walk and the affectionate nibbling lips.

Every week or so Enich, who was now working out of town at the Half Diamond Bar, rode in and stopped. Always, with that expressionless quiet that was terrible to the boy, he stood and looked the colt over, bent to feel pastern and fetlock, stood back to watch the plunging walk when the boy held out a handful of grass. His expression said nothing; whatever he thought was hidden back of his leathery face as the dark mole was hidden in the crease beside his mouth. Bruce found himself watching that mole sometimes, as if revelation might lie there. But when he pressed Enich to tell him, when he said, "He's getting better, isn't he? He walks better, doesn't he, Mr. Enich? His ankles don't bend so much, do they?" the wrangler gave him little encouragement.

"Let him be a while. He's growin', sure enough. Maybe give him another month."

May passed. The river was slow and clear again, and some of the boys were already swimming. School was almost over. And still Bruce paid attention to nothing but Socks. He willed so strongly that the colt should get well that he grew furious even at Daisy when she sometimes wouldn't let the colt suck as much as he wanted. He took a butcher knife and cut the long tender grass in the fence corners, where Socks could not reach, and fed it to his pet by the handful. He trained him to nuzzle for sugar-lumps in his pockets. And back in his mind was a fear: In the middle of June they would be going out to the homestead again, and if Socks weren't well by that time he might not be able to go.

"Pa," he said, a week before they planned to leave. "How much of a load are we going to have, going out to the homestead?"

"I don't know, wagonful, I suppose. Why?"

"I just wondered." He ran his fingers in a walking motion along the round edge of the dining table, and strayed into the other room. If they had a wagonload, then there was no way Socks could be loaded in and taken along. And he couldn't walk thirty miles. He'd get left behind before they got up on the bench, hobbling along like the little crippled boy in the Pied Piper, and they'd look back and see him trying to run, trying to keep up.

That picture was so painful that he cried over it in bed that night. But in the morning he dared to ask his father if they couldn't take Socks along to the farm. His father turned on him eyes as sober as Jim Enich's, and when he spoke it was with a kind of tired impatience. "How can he go? He couldn't walk it."

"But I want him to go, Pa!"

"Brucie," his mother said, "don't get your hopes up. You know we'd do it if we could, if it was possible."

"But, Ma. . . ."

His father said, "What you want us to do, haul a broken-legged colt thirty miles?"

"He'd be well by the end of the summer, and he could walk back."

"Look," his father said. "Why can't you make up your mind to it? He isn't getting well. He isn't going to get well."

"He is too getting well!" Bruce shouted. He half stood up at the table, and his father looked at his mother and shrugged.

"Please, Bo," she said.

"Well, he's got to make up his mind to it sometime," he said.

Jim Enich's wagon pulled up on Saturday morning, and Bruce was out the door before his father could rise from his chair. "Hi, Mr. Enich," he said.

"Hello, Bub. How's your pony?"

"He's fine," Bruce said. "I think he's got a lot better since you saw him last."

"Uh-huh." Enich wrapped the lines around the whipstock and climbed down. "Tell me you're leaving next week."

"Yes," Bruce said. "Socks is in the back."

When they got into the back yard Bruce's father was there with his hands behind his back, studying the colt as it hobbled around. He looked at Enich. "What do you think?" he said. "The kid here thinks his colt can walk out to the homestead."

"Uh-huh," Enich said. "Well, I wouldn't say that." He inspected the chestnut, scratched between his ears. Socks bobbed, and snuffed at his pockets. "Kid's made quite a pet of him."

Bruce's father grunted. "That's just the damned trouble."

"I didn't think he could walk out," Bruce said. "I thought we could take him in the wagon, and then he'd be well enough to walk back in the fall."

"Uh," Enich said. "Let's take his braces off for a minute."

He unbuckled the triple straps on each leg, pulled the braces off, and stood back. The colt stood almost as flat on his fetlocks as he had the morning he was born. Even Bruce, watching with his whole mind tight and apprehensive, could see that. Enich shook his head.

"You see, Bruce?" his father said. "It's too bad, but he isn't getting better. You'll have to make up your mind. . . ."

"He will get better though!" Bruce said. "It just takes a long time, is all." He looked at his father's face, at Enich's, and neither one had any hope in it. But when Bruce opened his mouth to say something else his father's eyebrows drew down in sudden, unaccountable anger, and his hand made an impatient sawing motion in the air.

"We shouldn't have tried this in the first place," he said. "It just tangles everything up." He patted his coat pockets, felt in his vest. "Run in and get me a couple cigars."

Bruce hesitated, his eyes on Enich. "Run!" his father said harshly.

Reluctantly he released the colt's halter rope and started for the house. At the door he looked back, and his father and Enich were talking together, so low that their words didn't carry to where he stood. He saw his father shake his head, and Enich bend to pluck a grass stem. They were both against him; they both were sure Socks would never get well. Well, he would! There was some way.

He found the cigars, came out, watched them both light up. Disappointment was a sickness in him, and mixed with the disappointment was a question. When he could stand their silence no more, he burst out with it. "But what are we going to *do?* He's got to have some place to stay."

"Look, kiddo." His father sat down on a sawhorse and took him by the arm. His face was serious and his voice gentle. "We can't take him out there. He isn't well enough to walk, and we can't haul him. So Jim here has offered to buy him. He'll give you three dollars for him, and when you come back, if you want, you might be able to buy him back. That is, if he's well. It'll be better to leave him with Jim."

"Well . . ." Bruce studied the mole on Enich's cheek. "Can you get him better by fall, Mr. Enich?"

"I wouldn't expect it," Enich said. "He ain't got much of a show."

"If anybody can get him better, Jim can," his father said. "How's that deal sound to you?"

"Maybe when I come back he'll be all off his braces and running around like a house afire," Bruce said. "Maybe next time I see him I can ride him." The mole disappeared as Enich tongued his cigar.

"Well, all right then," Bruce said, bothered by their stony-eyed silence. "But I sure hate to leave you behind, Socks, old boy."

"It's the best way all around," his father said. He talked fast, as if he were in a hurry. "Can you take him along now?"

"Oh, gee!" Bruce said. "Today?"

"Come on," his father said. "Let's get it over with."

Bruce stood by while they trussed the colt and hoisted him into the wagon box, and when Jim climbed in he cried out, "Hey, we forgot to put his hobbles back on." Jim and his father looked at each other. His father shrugged. "All right," he said, and started putting the braces back on the trussed front legs. "He might hurt himself if they weren't on," Bruce said. He leaned over the endgate, stroking the white blazed face, and as the wagon pulled away he stood with tears in his eyes and the three dollars in his hand, watching the terrified straining of the colt's neck, the bony head raised above the endgate and one white eye rolling.

Five days later, in the sun-slanting dew-wet spring morning, they stood for the last time that summer on the front porch, the loaded wagon against the front fence. The father tossed the key in his hand and kicked the doorjamb. "Well, good-bye, Old Paint," he said. "See you in the fall."

As they went to the wagon Bruce sang loudly,

Good-bye, Old Paint, I'm leavin' Cheyenne,
I'm leavin' Cheyenne, I'm goin' to Montana,
Good-bye, Old Paint, I'm leavin' Cheyenne.

"Turn it off," his father said. "You want to wake up the whole town?" He boosted Bruce into the back end, where he squirmed and wiggled his way neck-deep into the luggage. His mother, turning to see how he was settled, laughed at him. "You look like a baby owl in a nest," she said.

His father turned and winked at him. "Open your mouth and I'll drop in a mouse."

It was good to be leaving; the thought of the homestead was exciting. If he could have taken Socks along it would have been perfect, but he had to admit, looking around at the jammed wagon box, that there sure wasn't any room for him. He continued to sing softly as they rocked out into the road and turned east toward MacKenna's house, where they were leaving the keys.

At the low, slough-like spot that had become the town's dump ground the road split, leaving the dump like an island in the middle. The boy sniffed at the old familiar smells of rust and tar paper and ashes and refuse. He had collected a lot of old iron and tea lead and bottles and broken machinery and clocks, and once a perfectly good amber-headed cane, in that old dump ground. His father turned up the right fork, and as they passed the central part of the dump the wind, coming in from the northeast, brought a rotten, unbearable stench across them.

"Pee-you!" his mother said, and held her nose. Bruce echoed her. "Pee-you! Pee-you-willy!" He clamped his nose shut and pretended to fall dead.

"Guess I better get to windward of that coming back," said his father.

They woke MacKenna up and left the key and started back. The things they passed were very sharp and clear to the boy. He was seeing them for the last time all summer. He noticed things he had never noticed so clearly before: how the hills came down into the river from the north like three folds in a blanket, how the stovepipe on the Chinaman's shack east of town had a little conical hat on it. He chanted at the things he saw. "Good-bye, old Chinaman. Good-bye, old Frenchman River. Good-bye, old Dumpground, good-bye."

"Hold your noses," his father said. He eased the wagon into the other fork around the dump. "Somebody sure dumped something rotten."

He stared ahead, bending a little, and Bruce heard him swear. He slapped the reins on the team till they trotted. "What?" the mother said. Bruce, half rising to see what caused the speed, saw her lips go flat over her teeth, and a look on her face like the woman he had seen in the traveling dentist's chair, when the dentist dug a living nerve out of her tooth and then got down on his knees to hunt for it, and she sat there half raised in her seat, her face lifted.

"For gosh sakes," he said. And then he saw.

He screamed at them. "Ma, it's Socks! Stop, Pa! It's Socks!"

His father drove grimly ahead, not turning, not speaking, and his mother shook her head without looking around. He screamed again, but neither of them turned. And when he dug down into the load, burrowing in and shaking with long smothered sobs, they still said nothing.

So they left town, and as they wound up the dugway to the south bench there was not a word among them except his father's low, "For Christ sakes, I thought he was going to take it out of town." None of them looked back at the view they had always admired, the flat river bottom green with spring, its village snuggled in the loops of river. Bruce's eyes, pressed against the coats and blankets under him until his sight was a red haze, could still see through it the bloated, skinned body of the colt, the chestnut hair left a little way above the hooves, the iron braces still on the broken front legs.

TRESPASS

Robert Frost

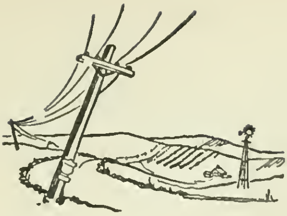
No, I had set no prohibiting sign;
And yes, my land was hardly fenced.
Nevertheless the land was mine.
I was being trespassed on and against.

Whoever the surly freedom took
Of such an unaccountable stay
Busying by my woods and brook
Gave me a strangely restless day.

He might be opening leaves of stone
The picture book of the trilobite
For which the region round was known
And in which there was little property right.

'Twas not the value I stood to lose
In specimen crab in specimen rock,
But his ignoring what was whose
That made me look again at the clock.

Then came his little acknowledgment.
He asked for a drink at the kitchen door,
An errand he may have had to invent
But it made my property mine once more.



They Set A Good Table

Alberta Wilson Constant

THE other day I read an article in a magazine. It was the kind of magazine that you find in the most expensive doctor's waiting room; so I know it was meant to be taken seriously. It was all about how to get your children to eat. It made me wonder. As I remember things back in Tennessee in the early teens of this century, the big worry was to keep the kids from eating. Was the food better then? Or does it just seem better across a vista of pale grey mashed potatoes served on the Vitamin Special? If the food was better, was it the ingredients or the cooking? Or is the whole thing just a part of the golden days when Papa paid the grocery bills? I wonder.

I can remember, for instance, when breakfast was a meal and not just a hurdle on the way to the 7:49 bus. Fully dressed and ready to start the day, the whole family ate together in the dining room. Mama wore a lace breakfast cap, to be sure, but I have always suspected that it was to make her look pretty.

My chair was right in front of the sideboard bulge; so I had to slide it in after the others got settled. Although the table was round when it came from the furniture store, it never reached that state again while we had it. Three leaves were standard equipment, and when we had company, which was most of the time, it took eight.

When Mama got the high chair fixed—and that was standard too—Papa asked the blessing. It was short unless the Presiding Elder was there, because Papa said the Lord meant hot food to be eaten hot. I used to wonder what the words he said were. I tried to look one of them up in the school dictionary but I couldn't find it. Just before I got married I asked Papa what "netredities" were and why the Lord should bless them—if Webster didn't. After some figuring, it came out as "bless us in what 'we try to do'." Papa never asked the blessing with the same zip after that.

We had fruit to begin with. Not orange juice. Orange juice came with castor oil. Grapefruit was daring and a little affected. We had blackberries or dewberries or strawberries. The berries were washed and sugared the night before and by morning there were tiny crusts of sugar crystals clinging around the edges of the top layer. With the fruit there was Jersey cream that flowed lazily out of the middle-sized blue willow pitcher. No matter how many times the berries had been washed, the last few spoonfuls of juice and cream would scrape against the bottom of the bowl with a suspicion of grit. I never minded it, though, and before I took my first bite I always mashed up four berries with my spoon so that the juice would be rich and flavorful.

In full summer we had muskmelon. Mattie called them "mush melons" and it was a long time before I heard they were cantaloupes. The name doesn't matter. They came to the table in halves on the turkey platter and they were full of chipped ice. Real ice. Mama always had Mattie dust them with sugar before she put in the ice, but that was a secret from Papa. "Salt," he would say, waving the pink hand-painted salt shaker, "salt and pepper is all a muskmelon needs when I pick it out." And Mama said, "Yes, dear, you always pick good melons." Mama felt she had to explain that to us girls about twice a season. "What a man doesn't know doesn't hurt him. Remember that when you have homes of your own. Besides, it makes the melons better."

In the winter we might have prunes. That sounds boarding-housey, but Mattie stewed them way down with lemon juice and the rind of half a lemon as well as the sugar. That takes off the curse of blandness. The yellow cream that curled through the amber juice like the stripes in an agate helped, too.

We all had oatmeal because Mama thought it was good for growing children. It was cooked all night in the fireless cooker. That was a contraption that stood at the end of the kitchen against the wall. It was dark and heavy like a seaman's chest and under the lid were two round deep holes that gave rise to a series of ribald jokes that wouldn't be funny to this generation. Into those holes went thick rounds of soapstone that had been heated through in the oven. On top of them went the two tall pans of oatmeal to simmer all night and come out steaming and full of goodness in the morning. In later years we experimented with cornflakes, the kind that came in a red and yellow box with the picture of a girl sitting by a fireplace with a crane and kettle and a cat on the floor. There was another box by the cat with the girl, fireplace, crane, kettle and cat, and then another box and on and on. The package was my first inkling of infinity.

After cereal came the real breakfast. Pinky brown slices of cured ham that almost floated in red-eye gravy. And little crisp biscuits. Mama wouldn't put up with thick biscuits with a mattress in the middle. Our biscuits were made with sour milk and soda. For a long time Mama thought baking powder was unhealthful. I still think a good soda biscuit can beat a good baking powder biscuit all hollow. But it has to be good and no yellow spots.

Right here I want to say a word about the biscuit pans. I think maybe they made a difference. They were thin black metal pans and we had them of all shapes and sizes and they were used for everything. They were the yeomen of our kitchen and of all the Tennessee kitchens I ever went into.

Of course we had grits with the ham, and the gravy from the platter was spooned onto them. The little kids were allowed to put open biscuits into the platter to pick up the last of the dish gravy, but you couldn't do that after you were six years old.

Ham wasn't always the real breakfast. Sometimes it was bacon with a mound of soft scrambled eggs. Lots of times it was liver or round steak. And in the dead of winter there would be country sausage, made of lean meat and seasoned with sage and red pepper. That pepper never saw a can. It would have melted a can. It was the ground-up pods of long-nosed red peppers, home-grown and dried, and it made all other sausage taste sissy.

Mama and Papa had coffee but we had cocoa. It was made with cocoa from the box ornamented by the lady with the Grecian bend who stands at the foot of a colonial stairway holding out a steaming cup. She was one of my first standards of beauty and when I saw her the other day on a grocery-store shelf the permanence of her fixed smile made me feel as warm as if I'd had a sip of cocoa.

I guess that's about all we had for breakfast. Except the mackerel. About once every three weeks that would turn up. Salt mackerel came in a keg at Eskew's Grocery Store. It was soaked overnight and then broiled in butter and served with boiled potatoes. All of us detested it but Papa. If he knew how we felt he never let on. Mama would fix all of us with a look and say firmly, "Now here's your favorite breakfast, dear." After that we just muttered and chewed hard. I can see that mackerel yet. Long shiny fish served with the head on. That made it look deader than ever. But there were compensations; likely as not Mama would have Mattie kill some fryers and the next day we'd have fried chicken for breakfast.

Dinner was at twelve o'clock noon and everybody came home. The few dumpy little restaurants around the square might as well have closed up, too, except for a disconsolate drummer or two who hadn't been asked home for dinner. There was a noonday hush over the whole town. Probably over all Middle Tennessee.

As long as my grandmother lived with us we had flowers on the table at noon. She could make a beautiful bouquet out of the unlikeliest things. Even in the wet dreary winter she found something. I loved to have salvia on the table so that I could pinch off a bloom and pull out the red tongue and get the drop of honey from the end of the delicate stamen. Nasturtiums were good, too.

There was nearly always a new print of butter on the table. It was a pale, unchemical yellow and it had a molded butterfly on the top. Jelly and preserves were in twin cut-glass dishes that made rainbows on the white tablecloth when the sun struck them. There were cruets of vinegar and oil but they were hardly ever used. Down by Papa was the bottle of Tabasco sauce that he called "Little Man." He used it every day and I guess all of us tried it once but we never asked again.

For just an ordinary day we might have round steak for dinner. It was cut thin and cooked through. Thick, rare steaks were no part of my experience. Round steak for our family of eight or nine or ten, depending on how many cousins were visiting, might cost as much as thirty cents. It had flour beaten into it with the edge of a cracked saucer and it had to be cooked right or it would get hard and dry. Mattie got the grease sizzling hot in the heavy iron skillets and then trailed the limp floury slabs into it. They hissed and smoked and began to shrink up. When the meat was brown on both sides she put tops on the skillets and let it cook ten minutes or so. Then she took off the tops to let the meat crisp up. With the meat on a hot platter, Mattie next made the gravy. All the fried crackling bits that stuck to the bottom of the skillets floated up into the rich milk and flour, and the whole thing got an extra dousing of salt and pepper. It was cooked till it made a sulky *plop, plop* sound.

The meat and gravy were put on the table in front of Papa. He carved with the speed and precision of the Brothers Mayo. He had to or he would never have got anything to eat himself. Mattie passed the vegetables once and then refilled the bowls and put them on the table for seconds and thirds. There would be mashed potatoes as background for the gravy. As long as summer lasted there would be black-eyed peas cooked with salt pork and a pod of red pepper. Okra, of course. And I mean just okra. Not some goshawful combination concocted to shame a noble vegetable. Little pods of okra cooked quickly in boiling salted water, served with butter, need nothing but an open mind and an open mouth. There was always a platter of sliced tomatoes in the summer. Big red slices, the color of Christmas. Mama liked to have chips of ice spread around on them and after dinner I loved to drink the icy water and tomato juice that stood in the platter. One of our cousins put sugar on his tomatoes, but he turned out badly. Everybody loved fried corn, but I haven't seen a dish for years. Corn cut and scraped from the cob, and fried in bacon drippings till a brown crust formed over the bottom of the pan. Cream and lots of salt and pepper were added, too.

Usually we had cornbread for dinner. We called it eggbread and it was cooked in those same black pans, cut out in squares and passed around. Sometimes it would be corn sticks made in my great-grandmother's iron pans. They were good and crusty but they didn't have the surface for gravy.

Another dinner might be roast beef. We had pork only in the winter. In spring there would be new potatoes served in white sauce called "dots and gravy," and English peas with them. Chopped garden lettuce, wilted with bacon grease, vinegar and sugar, came along then and so did radishes and young spring onions piled in the cut-glass celery dish. Between every two places at the table was a heavy glass saltcellar about as big as a half dollar, and the radishes and onions were dunked wetly in it which made the salt curl up in little balls.

Snap beans came pretty early, then wax beans, and then the big shucky beans that were partly shelled. But the epitome of all beans, to me, was the butter bean. We had them big and little, green and dried. And then we had a purple-striped kind that tagged along at the end of summer. We used to use dried ones for doll jewelry. Beets and turnips were dull stuff. We ate them without noticing. Turnip greens cooked with hog jowl and served with poached eggs was something I endured for the sake of the hard crusty corn pone that went with it.

Broccoli, Brussels sprouts, and cauliflower I never heard of. We did have cabbage. As cole slaw with sour cream dressing it was fine. But cooked—well, the less said about it the better. It was boiled at least seven hours and it came out a limp brownish pink mess. As my grandmother's *Old Virginia Cook Book* delicately put it, "not a dish for convalescents." We had sauerkraut, too, made in a barrel and cut down with a new spade, but I always thought Mama had it made to please Grandmother and not because anybody liked it.

We had all kinds of desserts. Blanc mange—Mattie called it "black mange"—boiled custard, invariably served in plain glass cups with whipped cream on top, homemade ice cream, fruit gelatine out of the box with that innocent-eyed little calf's head on it. But the thing I remember best was cobblers.

There was a kind of calendar of cobblers. First came the dewberries, then the blackberries; then there was a triumphant pause for strawberry shortcake. Now, you're not going to get me into THAT controversy. I'll just say I think cake shortcake is awful. Then came the peach cobblers.

You could smell a peach cobbler all through dinner, and when Mattie opened the oven door to take it out you had to swallow quick because that aroma would make the taste buds of a mummy burst into bloom. I don't doubt that if Esau had exchanged his birthright for a fresh peach cobbler he would never have regretted it. Cobblers came to the table in the longest of the black pans and were put in front of Mama on two dingy asbestos mats. The top of the pan was covered with rich pastry rolled thicker than for pie and it was laid over layers and layers of sliced peaches (fifty cents a bushel) with lots of sugar and a little flour and cinnamon and nutmeg and chunks—not dabs—of butter. The juice bubbled and oozed through the fancy gashes cut like fern fronds in the brown crust. That juice was the distilled goodness of Southern cooking. It was pinkish with just a faint hint of mauve in it and it had an iridescent overlay of tiny yellow spots of melted butter. Mama served it in cut-glass berry dishes and we poured the bowls full of cream. I loved to watch the cream curdle ever so little around the edges. That was one dish where the last bite was as good as the first.

Well, that was dinner. After that we tore back to school. Maybe we worked off the excess calories that way. Certainly none of us was ever fat.

And after school we were starved. There were strict rules about what could and couldn't be eaten. We could always have tea cakes, big thin cookies that spilled sugar off the top. Mattie made them by the thousands. Then there was a little barrel of American Beauty gingersnaps. They were hard and crackled on top, and the boys liked them better than the girls did, though they were good if you dunked them in milk and ate them quickly with the crispness going but not quite gone. Sandwiches were for the next generation. Peanut butter and crackers were a special treat, nice to take out to the playhouse under the hackberry tree. There was light-bread and jelly and cold biscuit with butter and sugar. Apples and those hard rocky green pears were a good snack. Mama had the pears wrapped in newspaper and put away in a barrel in the packing room to mellow and keep till Christmas—but they never lasted.

Supper came about half-past five. Mattie held out for that. She went home after dinner and came back at four to cook supper, for she wanted to get back to her cabin before clean dark. Tough white boys made life miserable for the colored cooks if they went home late. Supper was mostly dinner over again. Warmed up, I mean. There would be one new dish added. It might be macaroni and cheese. Sharp, crumbly rat-trap cheese covered the top of the big black pan and ran down through the delicate custard. It came to the table hissing and bubbling and just right. Miss Fanny Farmer and I have regulated ovens and our baked macaroni is undercooked and runny, or overcooked and curdled. Mattie had a balky Excelsior wood stove and her black hand for a gauge, but she never missed.

Wet hash was a supper dish. Pure hash, undefiled, has nothing in it but beef, potatoes, onions, and gravy. No peas or carrots or tomatoes or odds and ends. Hash is an accomplishment, not a catchall. With hot biscuit and hash you have enough for supper, anyway.

Another supper dish was chicken pie. Grandmother always made it. It had no discernible relationship with the individual casserole, one biscuit, one teaspoon of chicken and a cup of tired green peas that is served under that name in Tea Shoppes. Our chicken pie was made from two hens cut up and cooked till the meat was falling from the bones. Then it was put into one of the middle-sized black pans and covered with gravy and chopped hard-boiled eggs. In the middle of the pan went a china cup—teacup—upside down and firmly grounded on the bottom. Over all this went a short, thin, biscuit-dough crust. The cup, by some mysterious process, gathered the gravy under it so that the crust was never soggy. When Papa cut through the crust he would lift the edge of the cup and there was a great gush of rich gravy released just at the right moment.

For supper, we often had biscuits that had been baked at noon, split open, buttered, and toasted. Sometimes if Papa was not feeling well he would have just that in a bowl with hot milk poured over it.

Oyster soup, vegetable soup, and cream of tomato soup were all winter supper dishes. We were allowed to break up soda crackers in the big shallow bowls, but I don't think Mama ever missed a time reminding us that it wasn't really good manners, and we must remember never to do it away from home. At our house soup was served at the table from a huge blue-and-white tureen with a silver ladle. Mama used to tell us that at Grandmother's they always had oyster soup for Sunday morning breakfast, and the recipe began, "Take one hundred oysters . . ."

Party food was different from company food. Company food was what we had all the time, only more of it all at once. Party food was planned carefully and labored over. A party with invitations brought out the battered egg-stained cookbook and meant short rations for a day or so while Mama and Mattie "got ready."

Beaten biscuit was party food. It's a short, stiff dough without any "raisin'" and when it's made you take the rolling pin and beat it till it blisters—that's just before your arm breaks off. Most families had a special oak biscuit block. The biscuits are pricked twice with a fork and baked to a creamy tan. Never brown. A party becomes an Occasion when you have beaten biscuit split and with a slice of pink ham showing around the edge.

And that brings up ham. We always had boiled ham, never baked. I used to feel kind of embarrassed after I left Tennessee and folks from Jersey City would talk about Southern baked ham. I even used to sneak honest boiled hams into the oven and melt a fancy brown sugar paste over them. Now I let ham stand on its own flavor as long as I can get Tennessee ham. It's the packing-house hams that need the curlecues.

Our hams came from the country, and you had to have lived in the town since 1800 and have at least kinfolks in the Confederate Army before old Mr. Coe would sell you a ham. A good ham was at least three years old and weighed around seventeen pounds.

After you got the ham, you washed it well and soaked it overnight in warm water. Then you put it in a washboiler surrounded by sweet-smelling hay (don't ask me why) and covered it with water, tossing in a handful of mixed spices, three or four little red pepperpods, some brown sugar and some molasses. Then you let it boil on the back of the stove, turning it over once and cooking it till you could stick a fork to the bone. That took twenty minutes to the pound, if you're time-minded. It was cooled in its own juice and then skinned. The skin was saved for a covering for the cut side. When the ham was cold, it was sliced with a knife as sharp as God's Sunday razor. It was supposed to last for a long time but it never did.

Five hundred was the social card game in those days. A card party meant supper served in the living room and it brought out the thinnest Haviland and the most elaborate silver. As the *Courier* always put it, "At a late hour the hostess served a delicious two-course supper." One of the favorite servings, if the party was in the winter, was Scotch Stew with tiny baking-powder biscuits, Waldorf salad and coffee. That was the first course. The second was Charlotte Russe garnished with candied violets and rose leaves.

I want to tell about the Scotch Stew because I never heard of it outside our town and it is worth remembering. With ration points what they are, memory is as near as I can get, but that is something. It took three pounds of beef with no skin or fat put through the meat grinder. You'd better do this at home, or you might get hamburger. Put it in a deep pan. We used the fireless-cooker pans which are still doing service. Add three quarts of cold water. Boil three hours, and after the second hour add a pound of butter, a teaspoon of sugar, salt and black pepper to taste, and a dash of cayenne. The recipe says cook "till it beads." I don't know what that means, but I do know it is one of the richest, best dishes I ever ate, and if you are too proud to put your biscuit down in the gravy you are cheating yourself.

Chicken salad was as standard for weddings as the license. Every family had its own recipe. We had two. One for ordinary chicken salad, made when the hens had stopped laying or there were too many tough roosters. That had hard-boiled eggs, sweet pickles, celery, and maybe some pecans if the Texas kinfolks had sent us a barrel. The party kind was made of the breast of chicken, peeled and seeded Malaga grapes, toasted almonds, celery and mayonnaise. That last is pronounced "mi-onnaise" and made in a double boiler with milk, eggs, vinegar, mustard, and two cups of whipped cream folded in.

When my sisters grew up and had beaux they would do fancy things with the chafing dish that stood on the sideboard. It was left over from the days when Mama was a Gibson Girl. But the Welsh rarebit (I called it "rabbit" for twenty years) usually turned out stringy and tough. So they usually stuck to big platters of fudge with a shining slick finish.

Fruitcake was for Christmas, and so were mince pies. They were the only kind of pies we ever had. Ambrosia was always served at Christmas. It is one dish that deserves its fancy name—oranges and pineapple cut up and sweetened with powdered sugar and then smothered in fresh grated coconut. It was served from the big glass punch bowl into clear glass cups. Anybody who put bananas into ambrosia probably had a carpetbagger ancestor.

No, it wasn't any trouble to get us to eat. And what we had was just regular fare. Goodness knows we didn't "have money." Mattie was paid three dollars a week, and a succession of houseboys two dollars. We lived the way most of the folks around us lived. I know, because I grew up in the golden age of "spend the night." Breakfast was the same at the McClains', Cousin Martha James', Annie Green Smith's, and all the other homes.

Now that I have thought about it and written all this down, I think the food was better. It wasn't the ingredients. There was little refrigeration or rapid transportation. We couldn't have pompano from Florida, Colorado lettuce, Iowa potatoes, and California peaches at the same meal. There were no quick-freezing units and very few canned foods. Certainly the kitchen equipment was primitive alongside the chromium and glass of today. The most complicated gadget we had was a dover egg beater, and Mattie scorned that for the wire whisk.

I reckon the difference lay somewhere else. It seems to me that the things Mama and Mattie had that lots of people lack now were skill, accumulated by generations of good cooks, time—plenty of time and nothing pushing in—and a great pride in "setting a good table." I'd like them both to know that they did.

NEW HOPE MEETINGHOUSE

Edgar Lee Masters

My heart is full of sorrow over New Hope Meetinghouse,
It burned down so long ago it's now all forgot,
And weeds and corn are growing in the old-time spot
Where the folks once stood about, and talked when church was out.
I keep thinking of the people
By horse and shank's mare
Who assembled at this steeple
For singing and for prayer.
I seem to hear voices, voices, voices
Of the farmer congregation
When every eye was dim;
And the sorrow of salvation
Was a sorrow that rejoices;
And faith and its foundation,
And the soul's consecration
Were nothing but the singing of a gospel hymn.

The souls of that people were their own Holy Scriptures,
And they searched them by their singing, and instead of puzzle pictures
Of the Bible, they had song.
The mood that moved their singing was their test of right and wrong;
The creed was love and heaven, and the sweet forget-me-nots,
The poetry of Wesley, of Cowper and of Watts;
The faith was give the poor man, the humble man his due,
And make a neighbor in your heart of everyone you knew.

I never shall forget the eyes of old grandmothers
Who looked at me so tenderly
In their faded hats and cloaks;
Or Greenberry Atterberry whose voice with feeling trembled
When calling me a good lad
Because he loved my folks.
I still can hear their voices as they sang of love excelling;
Of rocks and hills and valleys where milk and honey flowed;

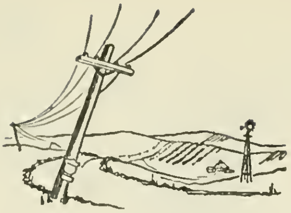
And how beyond the Jordan was a fair eternal dwelling
Where the heart would find its happiness,
And the soul an abode.
This is the Word as mystical as the coal borne by the seraphim,
Some seed was from the Bible, but their hearts were the soil;
It was a flower of human love,
Of man love and woman love,
A separate religion made of hymns.

And now amid the hammer's blow, the squawking of the radio,
The rattle of the trucks on the walls along the street,
I hear their singing voices above the iron noises,
I see the grove of oak trees, and endless fields of wheat.
Before me come the faces of old Malkom Hubley,
Of old Samuel Blivens, of old George Spear,
Just as I saw them as a boy assembled for the very joy
Of singing of a heaven that shortly would appear;
Singing with their women and their children of a happy land,
The faraway home of the soul beyond the flood;
Singing, soon the light of day
Shall forever pass away,
Singing of the fountain filled with blood.

And though it may have been that some debated sin,
And the fate that man was in;
And if some were soul-concerned
For salvation to be earned,
Not eternally decreed,
All of this is past and gone,
And their singing long was blown
Far away along the blast
That destroyed that simple past;
Scarcely memory remains
How they trebled forth the strains
Of the hymns by poets framed
All the centuries along,
How their spirits rose and flamed
In their song.

Where are the bones of old Elvira Momeyer,
Where are the skulls of old man Smoot,
Old man Craig, and old man Alkire,
Old John McNamar and Parthenia Clute?
Where, since the graveyard of the New Hope Meetinghouse
Was plowed up and harrowed and planted in corn?
Where, since they closed their eyes in hope of a paradise
Welcomed by hymns at the resurrection morn?

O Orphics, Orphics of the Illinois prairies,
Of Goodpastures, Clarys!
O voice of Royal Potter whose thundering tones
Overflowed the church as a goblet which brims,
In singing the hymns
In deep crescendos and quavering whims!
O Royal Potter, O Royal Potter,
What has become of your venerable skull,
Your resurrection bones,
Your judgment-day bones and skull?



Lady Wildcat

Frederick Kleibacker

A *BUTCHER SHOP—Deadwood, South Dakota, August 2, 1876. A rough-planked interior with a door in the rear and a window left of it. On the left wall hang cuts of meat. Out from the wall is a modern counter and below it a chopping block. Down right a door, and above it against the wall a wooden bench.* Jake Surdy, *the proprietor, is showing* Heinrich *a side of beef. It's about the middle of a hot afternoon.*

SURDY *(starting to cut the meat).* A juicy four-pounder oughta hit the spot.

HEINIE. It shure will when yuv been livin' on mostly beans an' bacon.

SURDY. Gettin' rich, Heinie?

HEINIE. Not when the sluice boxes ain't payin' more'n eight to twelve dollars a day.

SURDY. Bob Stillwell shure struck it, didn't he, up Whitewood crick? Heard he's ten thousand ahead already, an' he ain't worked sixty feet yet.

HEINIE. Yah, the lucky bum. Though he wasn't so lucky last night, was he?

SURDY. How's that, Heinie?

HEINIE. Didn't you hear about Johnny Slaughter gettin' shot off the box of the Cheyenne-Deadwood stage comin' down Split-Tail Gulch last night?

SURDY. Hell, yes, but—

HEINIE. Bob had over three thousand dollars worth of dust on it. There was fifteen thousand dollars in all them road agents got.

SURDY. Criminy! That's a hell of a sight of dust. There's been too damn much of that goin' on lately. Seems like all the gamblers an' outlaws in the West have stacked their chips in town, an' more comin' in every day. With all the killin' that's been goin' on, yer life ain't worth an ounce of bilge. Frank Towle, Varnes, Brady are practically runnin' the town now.

HEINIE. They think it was Towle's outfit that done the job.

SURDY *(cutting the bone with the cleaver and pounding the steak).* They think. That's about as far as they ever get.

HEINIE: Calamity Jane was sayin' last night 'cross there in Number Ten that the council's gonna make Wild Bill Hickok marshal.

SURDY. Hope she weren't too soused to know what she was talking about. Deadwood shure needs him and they couldn't stumble on a better man if they was blowed blind. *(Weighing the steak)* Jest a mite over four pounds. Eight bucks, Heinie.

HEINIE. Prices shure are terrible since this rush started.

SURDY *(weighing out* HEINIE'S *dust).* Ya telling me. Sixty dollars for one barrel of flour. It's plumb loco.

HEINIE. Wild Bill's the fellow that cleaned up Abilene an' Hays City, ain't he?

SURDY. He shure did. Better'n a Kansas tornado, an' without leavin' so much mess behind. *(At that moment a shot is heard across the street, instantly followed by a yell.)* Sounded like it was over in Number Ten, didn't it?

VOICES *(coming from across the street).* Wild Bill is shot! Wild Bill is shot! *(Immediately comes the sound of running, tramping feet. As* HEINIE *steps out of the door,* JACK McCALL *can be seen backing towards the butcher shop, standing off the crowd with his pistols.)*

McCALL. Keep yer distance or there'll be more of ya. Back there. *(The crowd mutters angrily.)*

CALAMITY. He's gettin' away! What's the matter with you men? Get 'im! He killed Wild Bill! (McCALL *is in the doorway now. He bumps into the petrified* HEINIE, *whom he seizes roughly and shoves in front of him.)*

McCALL. Get out of here. *(He leaps inside, closing the door quickly and bolting it. Turns and sees the quavering* SURDY *who throws his arms over his head.)* Hell's fire! How many more's around?

SURDY. None, sir. I'll swear.

McCALL. Yore lyin'.

SURDY. It's the gospel truth, sir. I'm the only one that lives here an' works here.

McCALL *(looking at* SURDY'S *hands over his head).* I see yuv been raised up right. Take 'em down an' put 'em to some use barricadin' that door. Hot foot it. (SURDY *starts pulling the bench in front of the door and piling boxes on top of it.)* Hear them coyotes howling out there? They want my carcass. Ya know why? I'll tell ya why. Because I shot Wild Bill Hickok. That's why. Wild Bill Hickok, the world's greatest gunman. Only he ain't no more. Who's the world's greatest gunman now, you pot-bellied prairie dog?

SURDY. Why . . . why, I guess you is, sir, if you shot Wild Bill!

McCALL. Don't ya know my name? (SURDY *shakes his head fearfully.)* I've a mind to shoot you down in your tracks, you namby-pamby sowbelly. I'll tell you who I am. I'm Jack McCall. *(Roaring)* McCall! Jack McCall! (CALAMITY *appears cautiously in the right doorway. She isn't completely dressed.* McCALL has his back to her, *talking to* SURDY. *She glances about the room, notices the meat cleaver on the block, tiptoes over after it, while* McCALL *continues to bully* SURDY.)

SURDY. Yes, sir.

McCALL. Yes, sir, what?

SURDY. Jack McCall.

McCALL. Remember that. An' this here's the six-shooter what finished Wild Bill. Smith and Wesson, .38. Remember that too.

SURDY. Yes, Mr. McCall.

McCALL. An' don't forget there's plenty of slugs left in these here chambers.

SURDY. I won't, Mr. McCall.

McCALL. Everybody was afraid of Wild Bill. He had thirty-six notches on his guns. Everybody was afraid of him but Jack McCall. Now they're all afraid of me. Look at them out there. They're skeered green-white of me.

SURDY *(staring petrified at* CALAMITY *who is creeping up behind* McCALL *with the cleaver in her hand).* Y-Yes, Mr. McCall.

McCALL. Don't stand there gawkin'! Pile up that barricade!

CALAMITY *(cleaver poised for action).* Drop them Smith and Wesson thirty-eights, McCall, or I'll split yu down the middle from head to hocks. Drop them, I said. (McCALL *sees the cleaver poised and does so.)* Back up in that corner, or I'll chop yu into hamburger.

(She threatens him with the cleaver. He drops back into the up-right corner.) Now give me them guns, Jake. (SURDY *picks the guns up and hands them to* CALAMITY *one at a time.)* Here's yer cleaver. It's done the best day's work it ever done. Frame it. Now tear that barricade down. *(To* McCALL) If I'd done to you what you jest done to Wild Bill, you'd be stretched out on this here floor in two pieces. Even a rattlesnake warns before it strikes. You murdered one of the greatest men the West has ever known. You murdered the one man I ever looked up to. Now we'll see what a bold, bad man you are when you face a little neck-stretchin', Jack McCall. *(To* SURDY) Open the door and tell 'em to come in. *(Men pile into the room talking and cursing, Sheriff Bullock leading the way.)*

CROWD. Here he is, boys. Take 'im away! *(Three or four seize* McCALL *roughly. Others go up to* CALAMITY.) Great work, Calam. . . . Put 'er there, old girl. . . . She did it with a meat cleaver. . . . Where was her guns? . . . That shure took nerve. . . . Lookit the yelly-belly snake. *(During this,* VARNES *and* BRADY *and* TOWLE *have been talking with* JUDGE KUYKENDALL.)

McCALL. I gotta right to a trial. I gotta right to a trial.

CROWD. Hear that. Right to a trial. *(Laughing)* Hang 'im! Lynch 'im! . . . It's too good fer 'im. Tear 'im apart! . . . Take 'im to the end of the town an' string 'im up! *(As they're roughing* McCALL *out of the shop,* JUDGE KUYKENDALL *steps upon a barrel and shouts out.)*

JUDGE. Just a minute, boys. Not so fast, my friends.

CROWD. It's the Judge. Hush it up!

JUDGE. Just a minute, boys, please. You're actin' mighty hasty on mighty short notice. You know as well as I do, two wrongs don't make a right. We don't yet know the particulars of this shootin'.

CALAMITY. The hell we don't!

MANN. Captain Massey an' Carl Rich an' myself were settin' right at the same table, when McCall snuck up back of Wild Bill—

VARNES. Prove it.

MANN. Why, of course I'll prove it.

JUDGE. You've got to do that in court, Carl. That's the only place you can prove or disprove anything. The rest of you boys don't know what happened. You only heard. Lord knows lawlessness is runnin' rampant in Deadwood an' we got to put an end to it. But we can't stop lawlessness by bein' lawless ourselves. We got to try him fair an' square.

CALAMITY. Wild Bill didn't get no chance.

JUDGE. If McCall's guilty it's up to a jury to decide.

TOWLE. Tell the Sheriff to arrest him an' put him on trial.

CALAMITY. Then he'd better arrest you too.

TOWLE. Fer what?

CALAMITY. Fer that killin' out at Split-Tail Gulch last night.

TOWLE *(putting his hand to his pistol)*. Take them words back, you—

JUDGE. Here! Here! We can't have this. We're sufferin' too much from hot tempers an' hasty words as it is. Sheriff Bullock, arrest an' hold him in the calaboose until we panel a jury. (BULLOCK goes over to take McCALL from the men.)

CALAMITY *(stepping to the center of the room)*. Neither Bullock or you, Judge, nor nobody else is gonna budge McCall one step outside this room. Take 'im to the calaboose! With him in cahoots with Varnes an' Towle, that two-seated privy wouldn't hold him till sundown. If yer gonna try 'im, try 'im now, or I'll take 'im out an' swing 'im myself, an' I'd like to see any mother's son of yu stop me. *(Cries of assent.)*

JUDGE. All right. We'll try him now. We'll hold a rump court right here where Calam caught him. Clear off the counter, Jake. We'll put the jury behind it. That chopping block we'll use for the witness stand. Bullock'll take McCall down there an' keep him in close custody.

CALAMITY. I'll see to that myself.

JUDGE. McCall has the privilege of appointing defense counsel or defending himself. Which do you prefer, McCall?

McCALL. I don't quite understand ya, Judge.

JUDGE. Do you want to defend yourself, or do you want somebody else to do it for you?

BRADY *(before* McCALL *can answer)*. I'll defend him, yer honor.

JUDGE. Is Tim Brady acceptable to you, McCall?

McCALL. Shure, Tim's fine.

JUDGE. Any friend of Wild Bill want to do the prosecutin' for the law-abidin' citizens of Deadwood?

CALAMITY. You bet yer boots. *(Steps forward. Everyone murmurs in surprise.)*

JUDGE. But, Calam, you don't know anything about—

CALAMITY. I know the laws of straight shootin' an' fair play.

CROWD. Calam's all right. . . . Shure, let 'er speak fer us. . . . Let 'er speak fer Bill.

JUDGE. Counsel for the prosecution, Calamity Jane. *(A few cheers)* To save time, controversy, an' bad blood as well as expedite the machinery of justice—at your own insistence—I shall impanel the jury myself. Every man and woman in this room is eligible to be called except for the following two restrictions: First, those who are potential witnesses; second, those who are friends of either the deceased or the defendant and therefore prejudiced. Counsels for defense and prosecution may challenge within these restrictions. Within these restrictions only. Will all who feel they do not come under the limitations stated form along the front here? I appoint R. B. Hughes, reporter of the *Weekly Pioneer,* clerk of the court. *(There's a shifting and moving of the people packed in the room. The* JUDGE *pulls out his pistol and uses the butt as a gavel. From his elevated position he pounds for order. The room quiets down.)* I hereby declare this court of law sanctioned by the citizens of Deadwood open an' ready for business, this second day of August, 1876. *(Pounds twice)* Before the court impanels a jury, it hereby orders all side-arms deposited in the middle of the room for the mutual protection of all parties concerned. They shall be returned in good order at the conclusion of the trial. *(There is a rattle and clatter as the side-arms are gathered and deposited on the floor by three or four men.)*

CALAMITY. Jake, stand over here where I am, an' if Desperate Jack makes a motion, lay him open with that cleaver.

JUDGE. The following will take their stand behind the counter in the jury box. Ed Durham, Jeff Balf, Sid Moon, Bill Curley, Al Lobdell, George Schugardt, an' what's your name, my young lady?

ELLA. Ella Larue.

JUDGE. Ella Larue? You sing an' dance at the Melodeon?

ELLA. That's right, Judge.

JUDGE. There's seven there now. That ought to be enough. Is it all right with you, Calam?

CALAMITY. Hell, yes! I mean yes, your Honor.

JUDGE. You, Brady?

BRADY. Shore.

JUDGE. Does either counsel wish to challenge?

BRADY. They're all right with me, yer Honor. Particularly the first one there. *(Crowd laughs.)*

CALAMITY. I challenge Bill Curley an' Sid Moon.

JUDGE. Reasons?

CALAMITY. They're both side-kicks of Varnes.

JUDGE. McCall's on trial, not Varnes.

CALAMITY. Side-kicks of Varnes are side-kicks of McCall.

JUDGE. That sounds like a pretty sweeping statement, Calam. *(To* CURLEY *and* MOON*)* Are you boys particularly friendly to the defendant?

MOON. Nope.

CURLEY. Not particularly. (BRADY *winks at* VARNES.)

JUDGE. Callenge overruled.

CALAMITY. But I tell you, Judge—

JUDGE. Prosecution, proceed with the trial.

CALAMITY. —they are. I know. I've guzzled with 'em.

JUDGE *(pounding his revolver butt and raising his voice).* Prosecution, proceed with the trial. Call your witnesses.

CALAMITY. Captain Massey. (MASSEY *comes forward; his left forearm is bandaged.)*

JUDGE. Take the stand, Captain.

CALAMITY. Mind your pants' seat on that there choppin' block *(A burlap bag is thrown over it.)*

JUDGE. Swear to tell the truth, Captain?

MASSEY. I should say so, Judge. I got plenty to tell.

JUDGE. Raise your right hand. (MASSEY *does so.)* All right. (MASSEY *sits on the block.)*

CALAMITY. Captain, where was you about three this afternoon?

MASSEY. 'Cross the street in Number Ten. Nuttall's and Mann's saloon.

CALAMITY. What was yu doin'?

MASSEY. Playin' poker an' havin' a few drinks with Charlie Rich, Carl Mann, an' Wild Bill.

CALAMITY. How was you an' Charlie an' Carl a-feelin'?

MASSEY. In great spirits. We was jokin' an' laughin'.

CALAMITY. Was Wild Bill in these same spirits?

MASSEY. No, he weren't. He seemed kinda uneasy an' worried about somethin'.

BRADY *(coming forward).* I object, yer Honor, on the grounds of a leadin' question. *(The* JUDGE *looks sharply at* BRADY.)

CALAMITY. Sit down, you weasel, till I get through.

JUDGE. Objection sustained. Cross that answer from the records.

CALAMITY. What! You old bloo-beard—

JUDGE. Objection sustained! Proceed with the examination.

CALAMITY. How was Wild Bill a-settin'?

MASSEY. With his back to the door.

CALAMITY. Did you see Desperate Jack come in?

MASSEY. I knew somebody came in, but I didn't know fer shure it was McCall until after he shot.

CALAMITY. What happened?

MASSEY. The stakes was purty high an' we was watchin' our cards close. I was discardin' when I felt somebody standin' back of Wild Bill. Jest as I looked up I saw 'im jerk out his gun. He yelled, "Damn you, take that!" An' fired. The gun wasn't more'n a yard from his head. Everythin' happened purty fast. I felt a burnin' pain in my arm. At first I thought I'd been shot by Wild Bill, an' I yelled. But he dropped forward slowly on the table an' slid off his stool to the floor without a sound. His cards was still in his hands. Aces an' eights he held. The bullet had gone through Wild Bill's head, come out his cheek, an' lodged in my arm.

CALAMITY. What did Desperate Jack do then?

MASSEY. He stood us an' Harry Young, the barkeeper, off till he got out the door.

CALAMITY. Then what?

MASSEY. He ran for his pony. But his saddle slipped when he vaulted into it. He picked himself up an' held the crowd off while he backed into Jake's shop here.

CALAMITY. Thank yu, Captain.

JUDGE. That's all, Massey.

CALAMITY. Carl Mann.

JUDGE. Swear to tell the truth?

MANN *(holding up his right hand).* Yep.

JUDGE. Take the stand.

CALAMITY. Was Massey's story true?

MANN. True as a rifle bore.

CALAMITY. Yu got anything to add to it?

MANN. Nope. That's jest the way it happened.

CALAMITY. Thank yu, Carl.

JUDGE. That's all, Mann.

CALAMITY. Charlie Rich.

JUDGE. Swear to tell the truth?

RICH *(holding up his right hand).* Yes, sir.

JUDGE. Take the stand.

CALAMITY. Was Massey's story true?

RICH. It shore was.

CALAMITY. Anything to add to it?

RICH. I shore have.

CALAMITY. What is it?

RICH. I'm to blame for Wild Bill's death.

CALAMITY. What do you mean, yore to blame?

RICH. Wild Bill was sittin' with his back to the door. It's the first time I ever saw him do that. After playin' a couple of pots, he grew uneasy. Said he wanted to change places with me. I laughed at him an' joked him about it. So he didn't change. I'm the one that's to blame. I'd rather stepped out myself than see Wild Bill go.

CALAMITY. They wasn't after you, Charlie. That's all.

JUDGE *(as* CALAMITY *looks about the room).* Any more witnesses, prosecution?

CALAMITY. Yes; Tim Brady.

BRADY. What!

CALAMITY. Tim Brady, I said.

BRADY. But, yer Honor, this ain't legal.

JUDGE. How do you know what's legal an' what ain't? Take the stand. *(As* BRADY *walks over, glaring at* CALAMITY) Swear to tell the truth?

BRADY *(nodding shortly and holding up his hand halfheartedly).* Of course.

CALAMITY. Remember when we was drinkin' at the bar in Number Ten two nights ago? *(As* BRADY *deliberates)* Harry Young does in case yu don't. He set 'em up.

BRADY. Yeah.

CALAMITY. Remember us talkin' about Wild Bill gonna be made marshal?

BRADY. No.

CALAMITY. Yu don't remember that?

BRADY. No.

CALAMITY. Do yu remember sayin' Wild Bill had better watch hisself if he was made marshal?

BRADY. No.

CALAMITY. Yu don't remember that?

BRADY. No.

CALAMITY. Yer a sawed-off, double-barreled liar. (BRADY *leaps to his feet, reaching for his empty holster.)*

JUDGE. If the prosecution can't conduct a dignified an' proper examination, I shall be forced to throw this case out of court.

CALAMITY. But, Judge, I was talkin' with him myself. I know what he said.

JUDGE. His word's as good as yours before the law.

CALAMITY. The hell it is!

JUDGE *(shouting and pounding his pistol butt).* I warn the prosecution for the last time.

CALAMITY. All right. All right. *(Back to* BRADY) Yu know Wild Bill plays poker at Number Ten every afternoon.

BRADY. The whole town knows that.

CALAMITY. Yes. An' you'll admit at three o'clock yesterday afternoon you an' Varnes an' Towle an' Desperate Jack were a-drinkin' an' a-talkin' at the table down near the door?

BRADY. I don't know what time it was. Guess it was some time about the middle of the afternoon.

CALAMITY. Did you ever look at the table where Wild Bill was playin'?

BRADY. I guess so. Hell's fire, a person's got to look somewhere. That don't prove nothin'.

CALAMITY. That's all. Wild Bill's through for the time bein', Judge.

JUDGE. The defense counsel will proceed. (BRADY *stretches on his toes. Takes his time in surveying the room. Scowling fiercely he suddenly bites out.)*

BRADY. McCall, take the stand.

JUDGE. Swear to tell the truth?

McCALL. Yeah.

BRADY *(after a long pause).* Who shot Wild Bill Hickok?

McCALL. I did.

BRADY. What's your name?

McCALL *(puzzled).* Jack McCall.

BRADY. What did you do it fer?

McCALL. He killed my brother back in Kansas. Hays City.

BRADY *(turning away)*. That's all. *(The whole room is startled at* BRADY'S *brevity.* McCALL *starts to come off the block.)*

CALAMITY. Jest a minute. I got a few questions to put to 'im.

JUDGE. The prosecution may proceed to cross-examine the witnesses of the defense.

CALAMITY. Yu say Wild Bill killed yer brother?

McCALL. That's right.

CALAMITY. Did yu see 'im?

McCALL. No.

CALAMITY. How do yu know he did then?

McCALL. Why . . . why, everybody saw him.

CALAMITY. Who's everybody? *Who* saw 'im?

McCALL. Guess there ain't anybody round here. But Wild Bill shot 'im. He's dead.

TOWLE *(startling the court)*. I saw 'im.

JUDGE *(pounding with his pistol)*. You're out of order.

McCALL. That's so. Frank Towle was there. He tole me about it later.

CALAMITY. He can lie just as well up here as he can back there.

BRADY. Yer Honor, I object.

JUDGE. If there's any more breach of court etiquette, I'll have you both thrown into the calaboose for contempt of court. Proceed.

CALAMITY. How do yu know yer brother's dead?

McCALL. He was shot dead. He must be.

CALAMITY. But you wasn't there?

McCALL. No, but Frank—

CALAMITY. Then yu can't prove whether he's really dead or not?

McCALL. No, but Frank—

CALAMITY. That's all, Desperate Jack.

McCALL. But Frank—

JUDGE. You may leave the stand, McCall (McCALL *does.)* Make your jury pleas brief an' to the point. Proceed, prosecution.

CALAMITY *(to* BULLOCK). Keep a close watch on that arsenal while I'm spielin'. Some folks won't like what I'm gonna say. *(Then facing everyone in the room)* My good buckaroos, there ain't no question but what Wild Bill was murdered in a foul an' cowardly fashion. Desperate Jack admits he murdered him. Yu heard how he was shot from behind within a yard of his head. That's how brave Desperate Jack was. That's how much he wasn't afraid of Wild Bill. He stands up in front of yu an' boasts about shootin' a man from behind. So much for that. Now there's the matter of why he was shot. Brady an' McCall say it was because Wild Bill shot McCall's brother. How do we know he did? We don't have no proof. An' even if he did, we have no proof that he wasn't within his rights. Wild Bill was a peace officer an' he had his share of killin's to keep the peace. That was his job. Now since McCall can't prove he had a brother, an' if he had one, that Wild Bill shot 'im, I'm gonna tell you the real reason why McCall shot Wild Bill. *(Points to* BRADY, VARNES, TOWLE, *who storm to their feet.)*

JUDGE *(covering everybody with his pistol).* Easy there, boys, easy. There'll be no rough stuff in this court. We're proceedin' accordin' to court etiquette.

BRADY. I object, yer Honor. The references of the prosecutor are irrelevant, immaterial, and not contained in the evidence.

JUDGE *(astonished).* Where in blue blazes did you learn all them legalities?

BRADY. I ain't been a gambler all my life, yer Honor.

JUDGE. Objection sustained.

CALAMITY. But, Judge, I'm jest tryin' to show that these outlaws are runnin' the town an' they paid McCall— *(Shouts of protest from the Varnes faction.* JUDGE *pounds his pistol butt.)*

JUDGE. Silence! Objection sustained, I said. Calamity Jane, I pronounce you in contempt of court. The defense may rest its case.

BRADY *(rising, smiling, he talks directly to the jury).* Ladies and Gentlemen of the jury, the defense don't deny for a moment that McCall killed Hickok. Our only contention is that under the natural code of the West, which is its only law, McCall was justified in killin' the man who killed his brother. An eye for an eye. A tooth for a tooth. The defense rests.

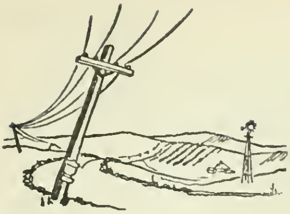
JUDGE *(to the jury).* The jury has heard the evidence and the pleas. You are to give a verdict by the facts of the case alone. You will find the defendant guilty or not guilty of the death of Wild Bill Hickok. *(The jury files out through the door down right. The door is closed behind them. The room buzzes with expectation.)* Keep that gun pile clear. *(Some people are forced back away from the* *center area. The jurors come back.)* Defendant, stand up an' face the jury. Announce the verdict.

CURLEY. Not guilty. *(The room is in an uproar. When things quiet down a little,* CALAMITY *shouts to be heard.)*

CALAMITY. It's all over. It's all over. I'd jest like to say a word to my old buckaroos.

CROWD. Let her talk. . . . Shure, go ahead, Calam. . . . Speak up.

CALAMITY. I can take my medicine, all right. I've done it all my life. Shootin' for yer rights fair an' square, an' shootin' in the back are two different things. When twenty-two caliber men run a forty-four caliber country . . . well, it's time to pull stakes or take it away from them. Citizens of Deadwood, citizens of the whole West, yer job is jest startin'. *(Picks up the cleaver and drives it in the floor near the guns, and stalks through the crowd out the up-stage door.)*



The Storm

Curtis Martin

THE WIND got up during the night, slowly at first, but by morning it was whipping across the plains from the north like something wild. There were two layers of clouds in the sky: one low, dark, and scudding above the plains in the great wind; the other higher, deep grey, and scarcely moving. At eleven o'clock in the morning the wind veered slightly and came out of the northeast.

"That settles it," Tom Fellows said, his wind-wet blue eyes on the northern sky. "When the wind shifts over to that corner at this time of the year, we're in for a blizzard. Son, you jump on old Snip and help me bring the horses in; then we'll get as many of the cows in as the corrals will hold—just the milk cows."

Tom and John, the boy, had been sitting around the barn all morning, their horses saddled, waiting for the wind to decide their course of action. They leaped into the saddles and galloped away to the south pasture where they found the horses already drifted against the fence, heads down and tails blown between their legs. It was hard work forcing them against the wind to the barn. Tom was closing the corral gate behind the horses when the first hard flecks of snow blew out of the sky like pellets of ice. They were herding the cattle in on a run when the wind softened. Before they got to the corral there was not a breath of air stirring, and great, light flakes of snow floated down so thickly that it was difficult to see. The flakes were so dry and cold that they settled on the cows' backs without melting.

The ground was already covered when John came to the barn door after unsaddling Snip. The snow slanted out of the northeastern sky in straight white lines, falling fast with the pressure of a steady, almost unnoticeable wind behind it. It was difficult for John to see across the corral through the slanting drive of snow. Tom came from the depths of the barn and stopped beside John. They grinned at each other.

The cows milled for a while, then crowded against the south fence, their humped backs protecting their heads from the onslaught of snow. The snow spread evenly; the wind which drove the flakes down from the sky was not strong enough to cause any disturbance of the ground snow.

The men stood at the door for a while, then went to the house. Lucy and Virginia, John's small sisters, opened the door for them and laughed when they came in shaking the snow from their caps and coats. It was dark in the house, and Martha, the mother, lighted a coal-oil lamp. A fire was roaring in the cook stove; the stove top was red and the odor of steamed food filled the room.

During the afternoon there was no change in the elements. Tom drowsed with his feet near the stove. Martha sat beside the table darning socks over an egg. The girls played with paper people they had cut out of an old mail-order catalogue. John sat for a while beside his father, trying to sleep; then he got up and went to the window and watched the snow stream down. The ground was covered with three inches of snow. There was a thick blanket of white on the roof of the barn and a thin ridge along the top rails of the fences. The cows in the corral milled a little, their snow-covered backs humped. The sky was dead grey, underlined with a thin veil of black. There was no wind.

At four o'clock Tom and John bundled on their coats and went to care for the stock. It wasn't cold. The snow melted in the folds of their clothing. The flakes were dry and light as down. There was a good warm smell in the barn when John entered it. The horses turned and looked at the boy. One or two of them whinnied softly. He climbed into the loft and began stuffing hay through the holes above the mangers. Dry dust that smelled of autumn smoked up from the hay. The horses reached up with long lips and pulled at the hay as it fell. John opened the door at the north end of the haymow. Snow sifted thinly in as he piled hay outside the window, then jumped down on it and carried it to the cattle.

Tom drew water out of the well and poured it into a wooden chute which carried it to the trough inside the corral. The warm water smoked in the cold air. The cows stood at the trough and slopped their noses in the water, not drinking. Afterwards the men milked and carried the buckets to the house. The big cream separator hummed for half an hour; cream trickled from one spout, and skimmed milk foamed from another.

The family ate supper and sat silently about the hot stove. At eight o'clock when John and Tom went outside before going to bed it was still snowing. The flakes fell through the yellow lamplight streaming from the kitchen window. The snow was six inches deep on the level.

In bed John lay quietly. The roar of the fire died away gradually. There was an unusual hush over the entire house. It seemed smothered by the thick blanket of snow and the curtain of the storm. The flakes made a faint whish against the window panes. That was the only sound. John lay fascinated by the stillness of the night, the wildness of the storm sweeping down from some place in the great north where he had never been, but toward which his dreams of exploration always turned. After a long time he slept.

The morning sun was so faint behind the clouds that the day seemed like grey twilight. The snow stopped for half an hour while the men were milking, but it was falling again before they finished putting down hay and drawing water. The wind was slightly stronger and the flakes drove directly out of the north. The snow reached almost to John's knees as he waded to the house.

At eleven o'clock the snow slackened, the clouds parted overhead, and the sun shone through a thin veil of swiftly-scudding clouds. The sunshine was very bright for a few minutes, then the clouds drew together, the wind stopped, and snow poured down furiously. By night there was eighteen inches of snow lying evenly across the plains for miles. Only the tops of the tallest weed stalks and the top one third of the fence posts broke the undulating whiteness. Nothing stirred; the coyotes and the rabbits were burrowed deep beneath the snow.

In the house that night it was quieter than on the previous evening. Tom wore a worried look. Instead of resting beside the fire he paced back and forth near the window. Often he pressed his forehead against the cold panes and tried to see into the black night; then the warm air from his nostrils steamed the glass over. He had expected a storm but not one of this size. He was afraid of what was bound to happen the next day.

It was difficult for John to push through the snow to the barns the next morning. The cattle were restless. They had kept the snow trampled down, and the corral was clear. They moved about, lowing incessantly. The horses whinnied when John went to feed them.

Tom stood at the window most of the day, staring at the grey scene. Shortly after four o'clock the change came. The snow stopped falling; the wind strengthened and veered to the northwest.

"Well, this is it," Tom said.

Before Tom and John had time to rush through their chores the blizzard was upon them like a pouncing wild beast. The light dry snow leaped like autumn leaves before the wind. The flakes which had been so soft before bit like steel into John's face as he struggled to the house. His sisters were waiting; they jerked the door open for him, then slammed it shut. They plugged the crack at the bottom of the door with an old rag rug and stuffed pieces of cloth into the holes around the doorknob and into the keyhole, but still the snow sifted in as fine as emery dust, falling on the red-hot stove, skipping and frying there. The house shook during extra-strong gusts; the fire leaped and roared in the stovepipe. John stood at the window, clenching his fists, wishing that his father would hurry and come from the barn. After a long time he saw him struggling through the white blizzard, leaning against the onslaught of the wind and trying to protect his face from the steel-like particles of snow. John opened the door. Tom's eyes were red and his face was already as raw as cut beef. The snow had blown into the creases of his clothing and become packed there as if it had been tamped. He stamped his feet clean, removed his coat, and shook it near the door. Then he swept the snow outside. When he finished, Martha packed the rags into the holes about the door again. The wind had settled to a steady, unwavering roar. The snow sifted onto the stove, spatting. Where the snow wasn't near enough the stove to melt, it drifted into tiny ridges in front of the cracks through which it blew.

In bed John pulled the quilts over his head because the cold fine mist kept falling on his face, waking him. The house did not shake now, but seemed to bend away from the wind so that when the wind lessened the house came back into its natural position with a sigh and creak of timbers from which the strain had been taken.

The following morning the sun was shining brightly in a depthless blue sky, but John did not see the sun that day. The wind whipped the light snow and swirled it furiously along in a curtain that extended three hundred feet into the air. Above that distance the sky was bright and clean, but from the kitchen window only a dismal greyness showed that day had taken the place of night. The family huddled about the stove; once in a while Martha got up to stuff the rags back into the cracks from which the wind had blown them. Tom sat on a chair with an apple box upended between his knees. He took a pencil from his pocket and began to mark aimlessly on the box. After a while he fashioned a checkerboard and blacked in the correct squares. When John noticed what his father was doing, he ran to the bedroom and got the soiled checkers off a shelf. They placed the checkers in position and began to play without speaking. The girls watched.

Tom paid little attention to the game because he was worried about the cows in the corral, their freezing teats almost bursting with milk. There was nothing he could do about it. He might have been able to reach the barn, but it was so cold that he would not have been able to do any work.

They spent the day quietly, bent over the box playing checkers. They ate supper without much talk and went to bed. John had been asleep for a long time and it was near the middle of the night when he was awakened by a sound that brought him upright in the cold room. The lamp was burning dimly on the table where it stood all night in order that Martha might see if the children were properly covered. Tom was standing in the doorway between the bedroom and the kitchen, his head turned in a listening attitude. There was no sound except the steady roar of the wind. Then in the wind, lower than its roar, there came a tapping at the outside door. Tom took a step forward.

"Tom, don't open it! Ask who it is!" Martha breathed in a fearful whisper.

Tom glanced at his wife. "Who is it?" he called.

There was no answer. A moment later the timid tapping was repeated.

"Who is it?" Tom yelled.

There was no answer. Tom glanced at the guns hanging above the doorway. The knock came again. In one stride Tom was at the door. He yanked it wide open with one jerk. A freezing blast shot in. The lamp was blown out. In the darkness John sat trembling in the bed, the snow and wind striking his warm flesh.

"Who is it?" Tom yelled again. He could see nothing in the snow-filled doorway.

Martha leaped out of bed and lighted the lamp and turned the wick up so that yellow light flooded the room. Tom stood in the doorway, his long, grey underwear flapping about his legs, his head thrust forward as he peered into the night. He saw a figure dart from the corner of the house toward the door, then stop as it saw him, and throw its hands high above its head in a position of surrender. The man advanced into the light; his lips worked but no sound came from them; his arms were raised above his head as high as he could reach.

Tom saw the man, and a grin broke across his lips. "Come on in," Tom said, motioning the man inside. "My God, why didn't you answer me?"

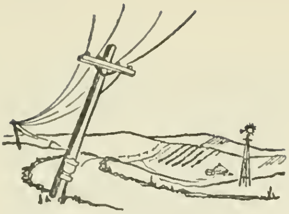
The man's lips moved but not a sound issued from them. He looked into Tom's eyes, and his face lifted in a frozen grin. Tom slapped him on the back and laughed, then he rushed to the stove and began building up the fire. He kept repeating: "Why didn't you answer?" He asked the question thoughtlessly because he knew the man, whose name was Andrews, and he knew that Andrews was deaf and dumb. Andrews had a homestead six miles farther up the road in the edge of the mountains.

The fire began to burn brightly. Tom came into the bedroom laughing and pulled on his clothes. Martha laughed too, in short, hysterical jerks. She dressed and went into the kitchen. They placed Andrews a little way from the stove so that he wouldn't get warm too quickly. Tom leaned out the door and dipped up a dishpan full of snow. He rubbed Andrews' face, hands, and feet with the snow for half an hour. When the snow melted, Andrews sat with his feet in the pan of cold water, a blanket around his shoulders, a foolish twisted grin on his face. He kept trying to explain things to Tom with sign language, and Tom acted as if he understood. After a while Andrews motioned for pencil and paper. He wrote: "I knew you would holler and ask who it was and I thought you might get mad and shoot through the door when there was no answer. So I knocked, then run round the corner of the house to be out of the way if you shot through the door." He handed the paper to Tom and laughed silently with great appreciation for the predicament in which he had found himself. Tom wrote: "What the hell you doin' out on a night like this?" Andrews answered: "I have been away from home since the first day of the storm. My wife hasn't heard from me. She don't know if I am froze to death or what. Today I try to get home. My car stuck in a drift four miles east of here. I walked about six hours to reach here."

An hour later Andrews was thoroughly warmed. He drank two cups of black coffee and ate the plate of bread and meat that Martha offered him. Warm and full, he could not keep his eyes open and fell asleep sitting in the chair.

In the morning the wind was still blowing but it had noticeably passed the prime of its fury, and was tottering now on weakening legs. Tom waited impatiently to get to the barns. Virginia and Lucy sat awe-inspired beside Andrews, the man who could not talk or hear. They wrote a constant stream of notes to him, which he laughingly answered.

At eleven o'clock the wind broke. Within twenty minutes there was not a breath of air stirring. The sun shone from a bright cloudless sky on a scene of dazzling whiteness that stretched away beyond the horizons. Tom and John got into their coats and went outside. In spots around the house and barns the ground was swept bare and clean, but on the south side of every building, fence, or bush that had broken the force of the wind the slightest bit there was a drift. The lane between the fences where the highway ran was level with the tops of the posts on either side. The granary was situated in such a position that a drift twenty feet high had formed in the center of the corral. The cows stood dozing in the blue-white day, gaunt, hungry, tired, swollen-eyed after the ceaseless hours of the storm. The horses whinnied softly as John drove them out of the barn into the corral. They drank for a long time at the trough, then nuzzled the warm water with velvet noses, playing in it. Out across the white pastures the mountains rimmed the world, cutting a swath of darkness between the spotless snow and the clean blue sky.



The Singing Snakes of the Karankawas

Walter Prescott Webb

IT was in the year of '83 that the events that I'm going to tell about happened. I remember it because that was a hard year in Texas and hundreds of cattlemen went broke, among them Mitchell Tally, the man who told me the story. Tally owned a big ranch down on the coast in Jackson County. The ranch had come down to him by a Spanish grant; it spread out around Karankawa Bay and was the finest that the sun ever shone upon. It was prairie country, dotted with motts of oak trees from which hang the heavy moss that grows only in the damp south country where there is warmth and salt air. In the old days it was a hunter's paradise. In the fall the ducks and geese came in such flocks that they hid the sun, and in the early morning you could hear the booming of the prairie chickens as they strutted like little gobblers in a barn yard. On this Tally ranch stood Fort St. Louis, built by LaSalle when he landed on Lavaca Bay, and near it Stephen Austin made his first settlements.

This country was in the early days the home of the Karankawa Indians, and it was in this region that the tribe perished. Off the coast lies a string of sand islands, of which Padre Island is the longest, being some 90 miles from end to end. There is another island, much smaller, but of considerable extent, known as Karankawa, and these two littoral, or sand islands, were the last refuge of the tribe. It is generally thought that the Karankawas all died before the Civil War, but that is a mistake. They were all gone from Padre by that time, but a remnant continued to occupy the coast and Karankawa Island, and the last of these, old Joseph, did not die until '83.

Mitchell Tally, who owned Karankawa Island, did not know when the Karankawas settled on it. He didn't care. He had so much land and so many cattle that he could not afford to worry over a lone Indian neighbor on Karankawa Island. Of course he knew that this queer old Indian made his home there, living on bird eggs, fish, and goat meat, together with a little corn and salt from the sea.

Then came the year of '83, and old Joseph suffered along with the rest. For some reason the birds migrated further south; the goats died, along with Tally's cattle; the corn crop failed; and old Joseph was driven from his island to the haunts of the white man against whom he had long nursed his grudge. But Mitchell Tally had a heart as big as an ox, and he took the old Indian right under his wing. Mitch was going through hell right then, with his cattle dyin' in droves, but he gave the Karankawa beans, corn, and meat and sent him back to his island home.

This kindness won old Joseph, and after that he came over to the mainland often, and him and Mitchell became right fond of each other. But Mitchell noticed that the Indian never invited him out to the island. Then one day he comes to Mitch very solemn and says:

"Long time white man make no track on Karankawa Island. Me want you to come. Me tell you about Karankawa." Tally gathered that he was to be let in on some secret of the tribe, and his curiosity led him to accept the old Indian's invitation.

At the time set the two crossed over from the mainland, old Joseph leading the white man to the highest point of the island where rocks were set all around like Druid temples, and in the center there grew a single, tall live oak tree—mighty fortunate for Mitch Tally. When they were over there the Indian takes from his neck a little flute cut from a turkey-leg bone and begins to blow soft-like on it the strange jerky notes of Indian music. Of course Mitch took little stock in this, him only aimin' to humor the old Indian some. But soon he hears a slitherin' and slidin' on the rocks, much like Eve heard, I guess, in Eden, and he saw comin' toward the old Karankawa the biggest and strangest snake he'd ever seen in all the snake-ridden country of south Texas. Mitch grabbed his gun, never passing up a chance to kill a rattler—and he could see by now that this was one—but old Joseph motioned him to wait. Mitch thinks he'll see things through—not fearing one snake. But just then he hears that same slitherin' and slidin' and when he looks to the right there comes another snake. But old Joseph motions that it's all right—and Jim stands his ground—until he sees them snakes a-comin' from all directions, little ones, big ones, and middle-sized, and then he makes for that tree, stoppin' upon the third limb with a mortal chill.

Yes, Mitch Tally felt reasonable safe on the third limb of that live-oak tree, and he begins to enjoy himself. Old Joseph seemed to have forgotten all about him. He was a-swaying back'ard and for'ards and at the same time movin' in a little circle, blowin' that jerky little Indian tune over and over, and all the while them snakes kept comin' up, and Mitch thought mebby it was feedin' time for 'em. There must have been fifty or more, all rattlers, and they ranged in size from little fellers with buttons to five-footers. The big one that came first seemed to be foreman—*segundo,* Mitch called him, or leader—and he proved to be. He wriggled and waddled up in about two feet of the old Karankawa and then "quiled" himself up as close as he could, keepin' his tail free for rattlin' and his head up with eyes fastened on old Joseph. But he didn't strike, he just waited polite as ever while all the other snakes kept edgin' closer and closer in until the ground all around looked like the scalp off that Greek Medusa. And Mitch begins to notice what wonderful colors them snakes had, bright blues, greens, and browns, not dead and dusky-lookin' like the old diamond backs and sidewinders in the rocky upcountry. The leader, though an old boy with at least eighteen rattles, was bright blue and green, but mostly blue; and Mitch decided to call him Blue—provided he ever got away alive.

Well, when them snakes was finally all set, Jim expected to see the old Indian feed 'em, but he didn't. He stopped the music, then blew a couple of sharp notes at which old Blue shook his rattlers as if approvin', and then all them snakes begin to "quile up" just like old Blue, leavin' both head and tail free for action. And all around that tree below Mitch was piles and piles of real Texas rattlesnakes.

Then the old Karankawa started up another jerky tune, and old Blue raised his tail and shook his rattles. At the signal the others all fell in, some low and soft, some loud and strong, and it was the weirdest and strangest music that was ever heard. Finally old Joseph let his notes grow weaker, and at length he stopped altogether, just standing there with his old eyes closed, swaying back and forth, but them snakes kept right on with the tune. Old Blue was leadin', waving his tail round and round, and it was easy to distinguish him from the rest on account of his size. Mitch Tally swore to his dyin' day that them snakes carried all four parts, the little 'uns tenor and alto and the big 'uns soprano and bass. And if any of 'em lagged or dropped out or got off key old Blue would look 'em over most disapproving, fan the air with his tail, or hit it with a clatter on the ground, acting for all the world like a choir leader whoopin' up a revival.

Finally the concert ended. Old Blue "unquiled" himself and led the way slowly and with great dignity—that snake had been well raised—out of the circle and back the way he came. The whole choir followed and in a few minutes old Joseph stood alone on the spot where the strange scene had been acted. He was still swaying, in a trance, dreaming of the glorious days that his people had known.

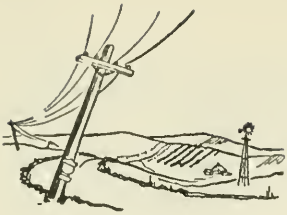
Well, Mitch Tally eases down from the tree and his hair begins to settle down where it belonged. Then old Joseph saw him and was startled, as though he had forgotten him entirely.

"You like 'em?" grinned the Indian.

"Indian," says Tally, "you show me strange things. Tell me, am I asleep or have I eaten the locoweed or drunk the Mexican's sotol that makes men crazy in the head?"

"White brother has good eyes. But he sees what white man never saw before," replied the Karankawa.

"I can well believe that!" exclaimed Tally, thinking of old Blue and his herd of snakes grazing among the rocks all about him.



Rank Hester's Hired Help

Jesse Stuart

I'VE FOUND A DRIVER for my last idle team," Rank Hester said, soon as he stopped his car.

"That's wonderful," I said. I knew Rank Hester needed to keep his eight teams and four tractors going all the time.

"You can quit hoeing tomatoes and go with me to find 'im," Rank said. "He is George Tussie and he lives on Wolf Creek. Do you know where Wolf Creek is? Do you know George Tussie?"

"I know where Wolf Creek is," I said. "I've heard of George Tussie, but I don't know 'im."

"Come on," Rank said. "Let's hurry and get 'im before somebody else gets 'im."

I climbed in the car beside Rank and we drove out the lane.

"Well, Chick, I hope George Tussie will be as good to work and as faithful as you've been," Rank said. "You've been with me eight years now."

I was pleased at these words. I would be with Rank eight years longer if all went well. I'd never worked for a better man in my life, and I'd worked for many men. He'd given me the best chance I'd ever had in my life—a house, garden, cow and the use of a car when I wanted it. And he paid me four dollars a day. That was good money for a farmer to pay. But Rank Hester had the best farm in our country! And when the government asked for more tomatoes to be raised this year, Rank Hester set twenty-eight thousand plants. Last year we'd only had twenty thousand. We had four acres of leaf-lettuce, twelve acres of sugar corn, six acres of cabbage, four acres of melons, ten acres of potatoes, forty acres of wheat, eighty acres of corn, thirty acres of soybeans, and twenty acres of red clover. We had twenty cows to milk, and eighty-eight head of beef cattle to care for. Last year we'd used forty-two men; this year we had twenty-eight, and Rank was trying to raise more stuff to help win the war.

"It sounds almost too true to get this man Tussie," Rank said, as we sped up the highway.

I didn't say anything. I was trying to remember the Tussies. I remembered when we used to go to square dances among the hills, Tussies always made the music. I'd never seen a Tussie who couldn't play a fiddle, pick the banjo and guitar. And they were among the best dancers in the hills. I didn't tell Rank Hester about this. He wanted a man to work. If he could play the fiddle, that was all right, just so he could do the work.

And I could remember when the Tussies drove their skinny mule team to Greenwood on "Relief Days" and brought back a wagonload of supplies. I could remember seeing the jolt-wagon go down Wolf Creek filled with Tussies, dressed in their best, running the mules fast as they could go, all heading for Greenwood to get relief. And as long as they could get relief, they let the small farms they owned grow up in briars and sprouts, and they stopped working for the landowners they had rented from. They stopped working when they could get enough to live on without working for it.

"What do you know about the Tussies?" Rank asked me. "Are they good to work?"

"Just fair," I said, trying to remember more about them.

"Well, George Tussie isn't a spring chicken," Rank said, "but he's not too old to drive a team. I told County Agent Bill MacKenzie that when he told me about George. I told Bill all he'd have to do was drive the team, ride the wagon and cultivator."

"He ought to do that," I said.

We left the main highway and followed the Little Sandy River road until we came to Wolf Creek.

"Sure a rough road," Rank said.

We drove three miles until we came to a country store.

"He lives near this store," Rank said. "I'll go in and ask directions."

I heard the merchant tell Rank he couldn't drive to the house, that he would have to climb a path to the top of the ridge and go down into the hollow beyond the ridge.

"That's all right," Rank told the merchant. "I don't mind if I can get a man to work."

"Work?" the merchant said excitedly; then he laughed.

"He'll drive a team, won't he?" Rank asked.

"Yep, I suppose," he said. Then he showed us the path across the mountain. "Leave your car parked here. Follow that path and it will take you to George Tussie's."

We climbed a path almost too steep for a horse to climb. When we reached the ridge, we rested a bit and mopped sweat from our brows with soggy handkerchiefs.

"Wonder how he ever got his furniture over this mountain?" Rank said.

"Must've carried it," I said.

We walked a mile or more down the mountain path before we reached a little one-room shack made of tiny poles. Cracks between the tiny logs weren't daubed; there was a field-stone chimney at the end of the shack not quite as high as the roof. There was one door and one hole cut for a window. Three hound-dogs ran out and barked at us.

"Hello," Rank called; we didn't go too close to the shack for fear of the hounds.

A tall man came to the door, bareheaded and shirtless. His pants were fastened around 'im with bark.

"Are you Mr. Tussie?" Rank asked.

"Yep, I'm George Tussie," he said, gruffly.

A tall, slender woman, in a dirty dress and with uncombed stringy hair, came to the door and stood beside George. She looked forty years younger than George. And two small children came to the window; one looked four, the other three or younger.

"Our county agent told me that you wanted work," Rank said. "I've come to see if I could get you."

"What kind of work?" George asked.

"Farm work. Driving a mule team. Not any hard work to it."

"Sounds good," George said.

"I pay good wages for a farmer," Rank said. "I'll give you a chance."

"But I'm a-patchin' here," George said, pointing to a clearing of about a half acre behind the cabin and another spot somewhat less across the creek on a steep bluff.

"Is that all you've got planted?" Rank asked him, as he eyed the sprouts higher than the corn.

"That's enough to tend with a hoe," he said.

"Don't you have a mule?" Rank asked.

"Don't have a mule, cow, hog, ner a chicken," George said. "But I have three good hounds."

"Ask 'im how much he pays, Uncle George," the girl said.

"I'll pay you three dollars a day, furnish you a house, a cow, and all the vegetables you want," Rank said, before George had time to relay the girl's question.

"Ask 'im how close we'd be to town, Uncle George?" the girl asked George to ask Rank.

"Five miles from Dartmouth, seven miles from Greenwood, and a hard road to each from my farm," Rank answered her instead of waiting for George to ask the same question.

"Tell the man we'll take it, Uncle George," she said.

"But what'll I do with my hounds, Viddie?" George said. "And how'll we get moved outten here?"

"Bring your hounds," Rank told them. "You'll have to keep 'em tied. I'll help you move. I need a man to drive a team that's been idle all spring."

"Tell 'im we'll go, Uncle George," Viddie said.

"We'll go," George said quickly.

"I'll be here tomorrow to move you," Rank said. "I'll bring a mule and a sled in my truck. We'll sled your furniture over the mountain to the truck."

"Is the mule a sure-footed brute?" George asked.

"Think he'll be able to hold going up or down this mountain," Rank said.

"Better bring ropes and a couple of men," George said. "Haf to tie ropes to the sled to let it down the mountain."

"I'll do that," Rank said.

"I'll tell you it's hard to get help," Rank said, as we drove back. "But it'll pay me to make a few sacrifices to get an extra man."

I wondered if Viddie was George's wife since she called him Uncle George.

Last year Rank Hester wouldn't have done this, I thought. I wondered if it would pay him. But Rank was one of the six "Master Farmers" in our state. He couldn't stand to see weeds growing in anything; he couldn't stand to see a vegetable go to waste. And if there was a man left to work in the county, Rank would find him.

Next morning, before daylight, Rank, Bill Blevins, and I loaded a mule and small sled into the truck. We took about a hundred feet of inch rope and we were off to move George Tussie. When we reached the shack with our mule, sled, and ropes, George and Viddie had just got out of bed. We'd come more than twenty miles to get them. And it was slow going to bring the mule over the steep mountain. We took their stove, dishes, and few old homemade paintless pieces of furniture in two loads across the mountain. George Tussie, Bill Blevins, and I each held a rope and pulled back to keep the sled from sliding down on the mule's heels as we went down the mountain while Rank drove the mule. The last load, George called his hounds. They ran through the brush, cold-trailing rabbits not far from us while Viddie walked behind, carrying the smaller child, the larger following her.

Midafternoon we had George Tussie, family, hounds, and furniture in a small cottage on Rank's big farm. Bill Blevins and I went back to work while Rank helped George and Viddie get their furniture set up, while he brought them a cow and showed them the vegetable fields. He took George to the mule barn and showed him his team.

Next morning when I saw George on the cultivator plowing sugar corn, he was dressed in brand new overalls, a clean blue workshirt and new work shoes and socks. I knew Rank wouldn't let a man work barefooted and shirtless and with his overalls tied up with bark. I wondered how he'd get along on the cultivator, for no doubt he'd never used a cultivator before. But Rank would show him as he'd shown the rest of us when we went to work for him. Rank would see to that. He would watch everything and everybody and all of the work, for this was one year the nation was calling for each farmer to produce more food, and Rank would do his best to do it. If the nation asked each farmer to raise twenty per cent more of this or that, Rank would plant thirty per cent more, so he'd be sure. Rank had never gone to college to study agriculture but he studied every spare minute he had. And he learned by trial and error, and men from colleges and universities came to Rank's farm and brought students to observe his farming.

I was pulling suckers from the tomatoes when George Tussie's three hounds ran a rabbit by sight over the cabbage rows into the tomato field. I yelled at them, threw clods of dirt to stop them, but they were nipping at the rabbit's heels. I couldn't stop the hounds; they ran among the tomatoes, flattening stakes and plants to the ground. They cut a swath of destruction the entire length of the field. I ran after them with a tomato stake but couldn't get near one. Then I hurried to the house to tell Rank. He came, looked at the tomatoes; then he went to the field to see George. That afternoon, George didn't drive the team. He helped Rank make a kennel for the hounds. Had I been running the farm, I would have put George Tussie off right then. But Rank wouldn't. He needed more men instead of sending one away.

Each morning I saw Viddie pass the tomato field about eight o'clock. And in the afternoon about two or three o'clock, often four o'clock, I'd see her go back with an armload of items. I often wondered where she went and why she had to go every day to fetch a load. One morning Viddie came over where I was working.

"Good mornin'," she said.

"Good mornin'," I said.

"Chick, I wonder if you could let me have a dollar until Rank pays Uncle George," she said. "When we moved, th' sled run over Uncle George's foot, and I haf to get medicine fer it."

"I can let you have a dollar," I said. "But I helped let the sled down over the mountain; I worked beside George, and I didn't see the sled run over his foot. He didn't say anything about it then."

"Uncle George never complains," she said. "You never know when anything happens to Uncle George."

"Is he your uncle?" I asked as I gave her the dollar.

"Yes, he's my uncle and he's my husband too," she said.

"Are those your children?" I asked.

"Yep, they're mine and Uncle George's," she said, taking the dollar and moving down the road toward Dartmouth.

When she'd leave, I'd see the two small children playing around the yard. Often I'd seen them play until they went to sleep somewhere on the yard. Once they went to sleep under the shade tree, but the sun rose higher in the sky and beamed down on their faces, and I left my work and carried them under the shade. When I carried them, their dirty faces and bony bodies made me have a feeling of pity for them. And once I thought I'd tell Viddie to stay at home and take care of them since Rank hadn't done anything about it. But maybe Rank doesn't know it, I thought. I worked nearest to their cottage and I saw these things.

I was over at one of the greenhouses pulling late tomato plants when Viddie came over hunting Rank.

"Is Rank here, Chick?" she asked me, sticking her head in at the greenhouse door.

"Right here I am, Viddie," he said.

"I've come over to see you about the cow," she said. "I'd like fer you to take this cow back and let us have another'n."

"What's wrong with the cow?" Rank asked.

"She ain't no good 'r something," Viddie said. "She's jist about dry."

"She's one of the best cows we have," Rank said. "She never has gone dry before."

"She's jist a-strippin' now," Viddie said.

Rank looked at Viddie; then he looked at me. I could see a troubled look came over his face.

"Have you been milking her night and morning?" Rank asked.

"We've missed several times," Viddie said. "Uncle George and I argue over who'll milk 'er. He gits contrary sometimes. Says he's got to git to the barn and git his team. And when he gits like that, I won't milk. I'll tell 'im it's his youngins same as mine that drinks the milk. And he drinks the milk same as I do—and he should haf to milk the cow."

"I want that cow milked regularly," Rank said. "No wonder she's going dry. Any cow will go dry, I don't care how good she is, if you don't milk her."

Rank went toward the cottage with Viddie. I wanted to tell him how Viddie left her children alone and went away every day. I thought perhaps Rank had seen her on the road since he drove one of the trucks hauling loads of vegetables to Dartmouth. And even George was losing time with the team when he had to go to the cottage and get his own dinner. I thought Rank ought to know these things.

Next morning Viddie stopped again where I was working in the tomatoes.

"Chick, I'd like to borrow five dollars this mornin'," she said. "I didn't have enough to pay fer the medicine fer Uncle George yesterday."

"I don't have five dollars," I said.

"I'll take a dollar if you have it," she said.

I let her have another dollar.

"If I were you I wouldn't go off and leave my children alone," I told her. "They went to sleep under the shade tree and the sun came up and was beaming down in their faces. I went over there and moved 'em."

"Sun won't hurt a youngin," she said. "Uncle George ain't fur away."

"Sometimes he's two miles away," I said to Viddie, but she was hurrying down the road toward Dartmouth.

That day Bill Blevins left the cabbage and came over where I was working.

"Chick, I want to ask you something," he said. "Does George Tussie's wife ever hit you up for money?"

"Twice," I said. "I let her have a dollar both times."

"I've asked several of the fellows working here if she's been hittin' 'em up for money since she's been after me a dozen times," he said. "From all I can learn she's begged money from every worker on this farm!"

"They let one of Rank's best cows go dry," I said.

"Rank didn't let 'er have another one," Bill said. "I heard her begging Rank. 'You're a rich man, Rank,' she said to 'im over there by the garage. 'You have plenty of cows. You get people on your farm and you try to squeeze 'em.' George worked well at first but now he's started takin' days off and sleepin' late o' mornings."

Bill Blevins hadn't more than left when I saw George Tussie's hounds at the heels of another rabbit making toward the tomatoes. I yelled, screamed, threw rocks and clods, but I couldn't stop 'em. I let them run the rabbit among the ripe tomatoes until I went home and got my shotgun. I wasn't mad but I was tired of such foolishness. They'd already destroyed bushels of tomatoes, and I was determined to put a stop to it. I cracked down on one and left him kicking. I cracked down on the second and hit him. He ran reeling toward the cottage.

Then I went over to Rank's to tell 'im what I'd done.

"See that truck load of tomatoes," Rank said, when I told him.

"Yes," I said. "Where are you taking them?"

"I had to bring 'em back," Rank said. "I didn't smell any coal oil on 'em this morning when I left for Dartmouth. Somebody went to the shed last night and poured kerosene on my tomatoes. I hauled them to Dartmouth and had to bring 'em back. First time anything like that's ever happened here."

"More'll happen since I've killed George's hound," I said.

"I guess it would've been better if I'd let 'em have another cow to milk dry," Rank said. "They are living better than they have ever lived in their lives; yet they call me a 'rich man' and try to get more. Every merchant in Dartmouth knows that Viddie. She's been begging from them, telling 'em that I won't pay George, her husband, and she has to beg something to eat. She's not ruined me, but she's hurt me. It'll take a lot of explainin' to make things right again."

"I guess you know she's been begging from all your workers?"

"Not until this morning," Rank said. "It was hard for me to believe until I reached Dartmouth and found my tomatoes saturated with kerosene. I'll believe anything now. She's even begged on the streets; she's begged all over Dartmouth from everybody—telling them that they live on my place, that I give them a dry cow to milk, that I owe her husband and won't pay 'im."

"What are you going to do with 'em?"

"Move 'em back to the foot of the mountain in the morning."

"Remember, I've killed George Tussie's hound," I said.

"Do you reckon he'll do anything about it?"

"He wouldn't be a hill man if he didn't," I said.

"How do hill men fight back?" Rank asked. "Will he want pay for the hound?"

"He'll fight with fire," I said.

"Had we better watch the houses, barns, toolsheds, garage, and greenhouses tonight?"

"We had," I said.

I was watching the dairy barn that night when I saw a flame burst from the Tussie cottage. It had just begun to leap high when I reached the scene.

"You set that fire, George Tussie," I said as I saw all their furniture carried a hundred yards from the cottage. "I can smell the kerosene."

"It ketched on fire from the flue," Viddie said with surprise, since I'd reached the fire just as it started.

The flames leaped over the cottage which had been showered with kerosene.

"Viddie, you must know where I keep kerosene for my tractors," Rank said almost out of breath. "You fixed the truckload of tomatoes I left in the shed last night. I'd better let you've had another cow."

"You killed two of my hounds," George said. "Wouldn't have taken this farm and all's on hit for them 'possum hounds."

Now all the workers who were on guard were getting to the fire.

"Go get the truck, Bill," Rank said.

While Bill Blevins went to the garage after a truck, we watched the cottage fall into an ash heap.

"We're taking you and your family back to the foot of the mountain tonight, George," Rank said. "And sure as there's a sky above us, sure as there are laws in this state, I intend to prosecute you to the limit."

"Ye hepped us over the mountain, why can't ye hep us back?" George said.

"He's a-goin' to make ye tote our house plunder back over the mountain, Uncle George," Viddie said.

"I sure am," Rank said. "You're getting off easy."

We loaded the furniture, one hound, and George Tussie, and family on the truck. Rank drove away from the heap of embers with Bill Blevins and me sitting on the seat beside him.

INDIAN SONGS

Alice Henson Ernst

MORNING SONG
(Makah)

My grandmother is the sun. . . .
(Lay your hands on me, Grandmother,
Lay your hands on Na-et-ka, who walks at dawn.)

With hemlock boughs my body is made sweet;
I go to bathe in the still pool you know well,
Rising while earth is yet troubled and dark
And your elder brother, the moon, walks in the sky—
An old ghost, who has taken a house where people once lived—
(Grandmother, the moon is dead, and ghosts fill me with fear.)

But you are alive; you dance in your fierce strength;
And I—I am woman now, like you.
The sacred cedar is in my hand,
I am hushed, like earth, awaiting your touch,
Your warm throbbing fingers to clasp my hands.
See: I raise them in prayer, singing my morning song,
Trying to reach you, to draw you down into bone and flesh.
(Grandmother, give me your strength, for I am afraid.)
My hands are small for great tasks
And the Makah woman is never still;
Calm, strong hands I need for many tasks—
(Give me your strength, Grandmother, give me your strength):
Strong hands for skinning Bo-quitch, the deer;
For weaving the fine cedar mats my husband and sons will use
(You have many sons, Grandmother; make my son strong too.)
My father, Wa-lax, the Wolf, chief of the Cape-People, is strong,
So is Kwadzai, mighty hunter of whales;
(Grandmother, did he see me, turning in his canoe, when he led off in the chase? . . .
It is fourteen days, and they do not return.) . . .

Why do I walk here, long before dawn, troubled by ghosts
While my playmates sleep? Last week I played ring-tag in the sand—
(Hold my hands, Grandmother, hold my hands.)

YA-IHL'S SONG TO THE NORTH WIND

(Tlingit)

Ah-hi-yoo. . . .
Hi-ya-woe . . . woe . . . woe. . . .

Wail, wind of the bitter breath,
Wail over the lodge-poles of men;
Wail for the hidden grief of man, lost here between two worlds;
Woe . . . woe . . . woe, you scream
And it is woe you bring,
Blowing out from forbidden worlds,
From icy caverns beneath old glaciers.

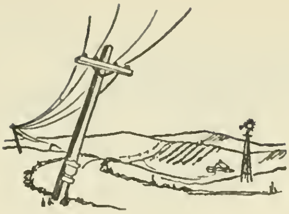
From the third world you come, under the Country of Ghosts
Who walk mutely, head downward, in that pallid world below earth;
From the Place of the Damned; place of unutterable cold, you rise
Holding your breath while the lost ones heap nameless griefs on your wide arms.
Wailing, you leave there; wailing with undying pain that must gnaw evermore at your breast.

It is the sound of your galloping white horses that men hear;
The beat of their hard hooves, the swish of their flying manes, the scream of their frightened neigh;

Your panting breath blows high the snow as you rush across mountains;
In the little warm bays the spray flies before you, and men shudder at what you bring.

The Little People, the Pigmy People far to north, who work always at forges,
They tried to warm you as you passed,
Blowing their fires at night till they flickered in sparkling flames high in the sky,
But you rushed past, driven by that ancient grief.

Blow, O Batl-et-lis, icy breath of the north;
Creep into my heart; it is colder than you.
I am your brother now, banished forever from rest. . . .
Cha-it-s'l, Little-Brown-Partridge, she whom I loved, is dead.



Two Women and Hog-Back Ridge

Melvin Van den Bark

MARY MATICKA became part of the Nebraska sand hills—that country of soft, yellow, shifting undulations that covers a heart-shaped fifth of the state like a sea, and is unknown and unsought by the toilers of the other fifths.

Early in September she came down from Ainsworth, thirty-five miles to the north, in the open spring buggy of the mailman. They had driven south for six hours on a road which was for the most part a two-wheeled trail scarcely discernible in the thin prairie grass and only to be guessed at in the sand and sagebrush.

The mailman slouched in the seat, his hat pulled down to his eyes, basking in the sun like a sand lizard, and licking and chewing the dry black hairs that fell over his lips. He said nothing.

Mary did not mind him; she watched the sand whirling in circles from the wheels. Some of it fell on the tin-can-covered hubs with a *peck-peck* sound. It was like water running through mountain streams, like the soft, chanting song of a smooth sea.

Gossamerly she wove the scene of what she was leaving—South Omaha, where she had been born, raised, where her father worked in one of the packing houses eight hours a day, knocking beeves in the head with a sledge, where her mother packed sausages in little white pasteboard boxes with yellow labels, and where her four brothers worked, too. Eight and ten hours of it—in the killing house, where all the streams were thick, blood-red, the clouds clinging steam, all the odor suffocating like warm blood. One suffered all that until one became steeped in it. Then it didn't matter.

But she had escaped to high school and had taken the normal-training course. She had her living to earn, being the daughter of packing-house laborers. There was stenography—a four-year course of it. But she couldn't accept that: eight hours in a nine-by-twelve room in a tall building, with the *click-click* of typing machines and the white glare of buildings through the windows.

It wasn't exactly that she wanted to be a teacher more than anything else. But teaching meant escaping the hog-butcher town, the smell of warm blood, the people there, helpless and spiritless as the beasts they butchered. She wanted something else. She had always known that there was something else. When a little girl, she had once heard a friend of her father's tell of a place called Utah—what, she didn't remember. But it must have been something fine, she thought, like lots of stars and sky at night. It was that something that made her baptize her little doll Utah. Really it was more than a name. It was something faraway, something beautiful that would make her happy. . . . Sleeping, Mary thought, "This is Utah, this is Utah, really."

There was the *peck-peck* sound of the sand falling on the cans that covered the hubs to keep them free of the grit. She was sleeping, after a fashion; it was the being under a white glaring sun that made the sky a blinding mirror, a huge candescent light of the whole heavens, the man who would not talk, the tom-tom regularity of the wheels crunching the sand.

It is like that in the hills. She was beginning to feel a part of that great unborn place, to be swallowed up, though she didn't know it, to become identified with it.

There were ages of sleeping, half-awake, half-drugged with the heat.

In the hot mist of noonday they approached Midvale. Before them swam the long low soddy which was the town—store, post office, cream station, house. In the billowy ocean of blinding yellow it was held by some magic a suspended purple block. At the foot of the hill lay the Calamus River, a ribbon strip of silver fringed with clumps of dusty cottonwoods that twinkled, and rattled dry brownish-green leaves.

They pulled up the hill slowly and with effort, the sand scratching, grinding, showering from the wheels into the buggy. When the top was reached, the horses stopped and the mailman climbed out. He pulled a limp mailsack from under the seat, shook it a little, dragged it into the soddy.

Then Mary Maticka climbed out. She walked a few steps to the high point of the hill and looked out into the sea of yellow, green, lavender folds.

Strangely, mysteriously, she seemed to find something of what she wanted: stillness and inaction, that for her was being; a sort of melting out into the nakedness of those hills, swaying there identified with its monotony and melancholy, in an ocean of dreams without a sound.

The group of women in the doorway, who had come to trade and to get the mail, saw the large young woman with blue-black hair cropped to the nape of her neck, a loose-fitting orange jacket, a black skirt. They saw, too, her feet planted firmly, apart, as though she were holding her body from the wind. The women in the low dark doorway watched her. One said, "Did the board know she'd bobbed hair and was yellow-like?" And another, "What does she see?"

And they looked steadily at Mary and they saw what she was facing. Far over the north, west and south was a heat-hazed, treeless region stretching in soft, round hills that faraway blurred into the white sky. Here and there were blots of cream-colored dunes in the gray-olive hills. The grass was burnt brown, the air hot and fanning an aroma of dry grass over the country that far and near had the monotony and the melancholy and something of the beauty and the fascination of the sea under an eternal sun.

Mary stood still, inarticulate, her eyes like black pools into which the light sinks. She was as wooden then as though her soul were flying about the hills like a swallow.

The women watched her and wondered curiously. They did not see the hills, but they saw Mary like a splash of strange new color, these wives of toilers who neither laugh nor see. And beyond her they saw the prairie—still prairie, excepting that it is now cut into checkerboard sections and fenced here and there. On those squares of parched hills they have built their soddies, dugouts, half-soddies maybe, rarely a frame house. And all the toilers are struggling to dig a living out of the soil in this region which God never made for farming. Never made for farming; they feel that. But they are helpless and drugged dry-eyed and passionless with the soft hills and the soft low winds that never die. Never do they whimper, nor ever wonder about other lands from which some of them came. They ask nothing, nothing except that all who venture in become sand-hillers.

Finally Mary turned and walked to the soddy. The women stepped a little back and she entered.

"You are Mrs. Brindly?" she asked one woman.

"Yes," the woman said. "And you're Mary Maticka." A little girl dressed in a faded and thin blue calico slip, whose hair was yellow and thin, whose legs were bare and dirty, was tugging at a fold in the woman's skirt. "We ken go over to Mr. Lange's now. The schoolmams always board there. And he ken sign your contract. He ain't signed yet, is he?"

"No," said Mary.

"You must be tired," Mrs. Brindly said.

"Not very, really," Mary answered.

They went out the low door and over to a lumber wagon. A young man, tanned brown as coffee, jumped from the seat and took Mary Maticka's bag without saying a word.

"This is my son John. He's got your things in here. You paid the mailman?"

John Brindly sat on a board across the front of the wagon. The women seated themselves in the spring seat which had been moved to the center for them.

They thumped along over the two miles of hidden road among the brown warty hills to the soddy of the Langes. It was a small sod house with a curved roof; it looked like a huge, dry mud-pie bread loaf. On one side was a carpet patch of yellowish-green garden; on the other side was a low frame barn. One could smell the cabbage patch, the stable, the dry grass. A man was standing under the patched tin watershed that stuck out above the door like the peak of a cap.

The three alighted and the man came up. He was stoop-shouldered and wore a greenish felt hat punched with diamond-shaped holes. His face was yellowish-brown like a dry cottonwood leaf.

"Good afternoon," he said, looking at the horses and then into the wagon.

"This is the new schoolmam, Mr. Lange."

"Glad to know ya," he said. He put out his hand, which Mary took quickly and firmly. "Grub's hard scratching here, but we've boarded the schoolmams six terms now." He chuckled a little. "Hope you'll like it."

"I want to, Mr. Lange," Mary said.

Then he told her about the schoolteacher of the past year. She had come to the hills in a camp-wagon with her husband. The district hadn't a teacher yet, it seemed, and, when they learned that this woman had held a term in some place in Missouri, they got her a permit and hired her. But she had had twins at Christmas time, and they let her go. The year before that, he went on, they had a girl from Lincoln. But while playing a game at a party she sat on a married man's lap. "She was let go," he said, "seein' she was no model fer the district." They had a new schoolhouse now, a frame building, and they wanted things to go pert, the children to get learning, to show progress. His boy Roscoe was sixteen, and had been in the fifth reader for three terms. He wanted him to get out of that reader. He hoped, too, that the new schoolmam was sensible.

Then Mary met Mrs. Lange and the three Lange boys and the two Lange girls, one of whom was called Judy. Mrs. Lange was tall, thin, starved-looking. Her eyes were two black caverns, black as though they were circled with paint. Her cheeks were hollow. Her whole face had something of the mockery, the bitterness of an inscrutable gargoyle. It was hideous, yet fascinating. One expected a voice from her belly, deep and empty, and words inarticulate, grunted.

Mrs. Lange at first saw Mary indifferently, unseeing almost. When she looked up, her head swung slowly from side to side with her breathing. Then her eyes became fixed on Mary, frightened as though this young woman were filling the whole soddy and pressing against her, going to strike her, pushing her into the wall. Then there was a quick, faint lighting in Mrs. Lange's face—a sort of recognition. But it as soon went out.

Mary was to share a room with Judy—a narrow room, one of the partitioned-off ends of the house. It was lighted by a small four-paned window which could be lowered only halfway. The walls were plastered with gumbo, a flat-grey, clay plaster dug up a few feet below the sand on the place. In one corner was a low, knobbed bed, painted a dark heavy green and covered with a blue, star-pattern quilt. There was an old dresser at one end of the room, and red paper hearts, children's valentines made at school, were stuck on the mirror's edge. The room had a simplicity, and a crudity that one finds in the homes of some peasants. There was a roughness, and an easy comfort like an old ballad in it all. The greys and greens and blues of the room were of the earth itself.

Mary threw her orange coat on the bed. Then she went into the kitchen. Mrs. Lange was taking a piece of black paper the size of a postcard from a package. She put it into a saucer, covered it with water, and set it between a myrtle tree and a cactus plant in the deep window sill. This paper would attract and poison flies. Then she wiped her hands on the underside of her dark apron.

"I ain't spread much . . . Miss Maticka," said Mrs. Lange. She spoke low, with a drawl. With her cooking spoon she made big circles in the pot of cabbage soup she had on the stove. There would be that, baked squash, boiled potatoes, and fried pork for supper.

"You may call me Mary, Mrs. Lange." Mary took a chair by the kitchen table.

"We're used to callin' the other schoolmams so. I hope you'll like it here. It's different from most places. Some like it; but some don't. Seems as like it holds you though."

"It is something of a world by itself, isn't it? Shut in by the chains of hills that bubble into each other like waves in the sea. Huge, golden, round waves. . . ." Mary looked out the white oblong of the doorway. "You like living here?"

"No, not always. It's hard grubbin', as the menfolk say. We've some garden—that's the only green. But a garden one year is a blowout the next. . . . Yes, it is something like a sea," said this old-looking woman who could never have been young. "But I don't often get time or feelin' to think like that."

"A blowout?"

"A witch's pot—hollowed, useless hole in the hills—blown that way. The wind is forever changing the hills, like waves. God didn't make this fer farmin', Henry says. He would leave, and yet he won't. And nothin' much ever comes or happens here. We're swallowed-like. . . . Like the sea . . . yes."

After the school day, Mary would write the next day's assignments and exercises on the blackboard and would change the water in the jar that held the yellow-thimbles or grasses she picked or was given. Sometimes after school she would read from the books sent in a chest to the district by the State's Traveling Library Society.

All this was very much as a schoolteacher should be: the exercises on the board, the yellow-thimbles in the quart fruit jars, the books from the traveling library. All that was very well. But that wasn't all. Schoolteachers should not walk early, late, very late, on Hog-back Ridge, or any ridge for that matter. This long, humped hill, Hog-back Ridge, dominated the others, its smooth curve drew a longer line across the sky. It was the only one that was named in the country thereabouts. It was of looser sand, more worthless, and would give root to neither grass nor weeds. The cattle never nosed it. It was a bully among the other hills. No, one shouldn't stride it like a pirate.

But all the sand-hillers about became used to the figure of the young woman whipped by the wind . . . the orange jacket like a still flame, the black skirt. And the sand-hillers in the district soon saw that she was different, that she wasn't "regular" like a schoolteacher is expected to be. It might have been the orange jacket she wore, full, and bright as a torch, or the black hair cut short, with a crescent of steel-blue when the light fell on it.

More than once Mrs. Lange in her doorway saw Mary Maticka stand on the hills that were like soft silver in the moonlight. And at their base along the dry creek bed were clumps of cottonwoods, dark and somber. When the branches stirred, the bright light danced on the ground, making lacy patterns of the moonlight. There was a stillness like before creation. It would be broken only by a voice in a faraway cup of the hills calling to cattle. The echo would fly about . . . farther and farther away.

Sometimes Mary Maticka would stand for half an hour, sometimes much longer, on the highest part of Hog-back Ridge. And Mrs. Lange, pitting chokecherries, would look at that dark figure against the sky until her eyes burned. She would put her hands on the door plank on which she sat, and thrust her head forward. She looked hungry. She would wipe her hands across her eyes and the purple juice would make her eyes burn the more.

Once little Judy, thin and elfin, came straying about the corner.

"What er ya lookin' at, Ma?" she asked.

The mother turned to the child who was squatted beside her, said nothing, stretched forward again.

"Ain't she queer? But she ain't one bit aferd, she tol' me. Old Lady Brindly marked it was the beads she carries in 'er pockets, saved 'er from bein' ferd. Do ya know 'bout that, Ma? . . . She carries brown beads and there's a little cross on 'em. Old Man Brindly says she's most like a witch walkin' over the hills all time o' night scared a nothin'. And I told er' Old Man Brindly said he never let 'er in the district ag'in. And I told Old Brindly 'bout that black cross with the stuff on it like comes off matches—like fireflies. And Old Lady Brindly says 'John tol' 'er Mary ain't God-feared, but's poetry.' Think a that, Ma."

"Keep still, Judy," said Mrs. Lange.

"Ain't she queer, Ma?" asked the child.

Mrs. Lange looked eager, hungry, as if something she had waited for a hundred years was within her vision, something she could breathe, something she could melt into. And there was, too, little Judy, sitting at her mother's side and bending to the hills; wondering, peering, strange little child.

Then another figure arose on the hilltop. The two stood like black posts against the green sky above the silver hill. When they sat they made a large black tumbleweed against the skyline. Then Mrs. Lange knew that John Brindly was there, too.

But generally she saw just the one dark line against night. And on black or stormy nights she could see no line, but she knew it was moving about, talking and singing on Hog-back Ridge, or perhaps silent and brooding in the cups among the hills.

The rain would patter on the tin watershed above the door; it would rattle the watershed like faraway thunder. Mary would stay out; sometimes she waited until it stopped; then she would come in.

"She's a fool; that's what she is, a damn fool," Old Lange would say. "Runnin' 'round school nights. It's educatin' kids is 'er business. She's cheating the district. She ain't right, I tell you."

Mrs. Lange would say nothing, her eyes and cheeks lost in the deep, dark shadows, her head like a white skull on a black curtain. From the dark corner she would face the lamp, which made a yellow circle like a big harvest moon on the red-and-white checkered tablecloth.

Yes, indeed, Mary wasn't regular; she was queer. And Mr. Lange was afraid because she wasn't regular. He was afraid of her because she liked the place; she chased about the hills like the large spider-web balls of tumbleweed.

And not only she; no, it wasn't only she. For Mr. Lange, too, something of Mrs. Lange was always with her, as though her heart were being carried about in the pocket of Mary's loose-fitting orange jacket. Mary was like a floating, revealing spirit to his woman. It wasn't natural, regular, this silent calling and pointing of the one, this silent answering and changing in the other. He was losing her, perhaps, losing his woman. And it was all through damned rotten nonsense. This Mary had no business drawing his woman with her. It was like having a dead woman moving about the house, an empty, sightless woman.

Old Lange knew he'd do something about it. He could face this situation. He had others. He'd show the sand-hillers there that he'd do something about it.

And so it was that with her beads, and her walking of nights, late, in the moonlight, under white stars, and in the storm, Mary Maticka began to be talked about. But the sand-hillers' talking about Mary wasn't enough. It wouldn't do much of anything, Lange thought. They didn't know about what was happening to his woman. They didn't see that. Their talking their way about Mary was all right. It would help, perhaps, in ousting her. And only ousting her could save his woman from this mooning, this strange acting, this foolishness.

It was this way at the Langes' one day. Old Lange was leaning against the big range. "We can't have this talkin' 'bout Mary," he began. "'Tain't good fer 'er and 'tain't good fer us. 'Er runnin' out a stormy nights worse en a coyote, and with that orange coat and horse-mane hair. . . . When I first seen 'er I says she's mighty peculiar eyes, all black like she didn't have any white—like a cat's at night. Eyes tells it."

For a moment Mrs. Lange looked up from the cabbage she was cutting for kraut; then she bent to her cutting again. "She's finding things, perhaps—things we've all been wantin'—something here I've wanted, but forgot I wanted. I don't know. That's the reason her and John Brindly wander about—her alone mostly, but him always wantin' to be along. And it comes in the rain to her, too. I remember it's like my mother always used to get out in the rain—and I like it, too."

She looked unseeing, vacantly, at the lamp on the table.

"That's what I'm comin' to—just what I've been thinkin'. You watchin' her hungry-like—'tain't good fer us, I say. She'd best go. She ain't settin' no model fer the kids, and youse gettin' that way. Youse like you wasn't in the house . . . damn 'er."

He walked over to the hay burner, a boiler-like article which was stuffed with hay. He spat into it. Then he put it, inverted, on the open stove. The fire crackled up into the hay and clouds of white smoke spurted out with the heat. The smudge filled the room, like a heavy incense, clouded the smaller children who were playing under the table, and the pile of cow chips, another kind of sand-hiller's fuel, which was heaped high in the corner near the stove. The lamp glow was like a dull lemon-yellow moon in a blue-grey fog.

Through the fog her voice came low, hollow, dead. "I like her and so do the children. Judy loves her specially. . . . That's poetry, they say, she sees in the hills. I wish I could see it. I'd be better here."

And the other voice in the fog answered, "Yeah, ya like 'er fifteen a month, ya do. But I ain't goin' to put up with a schoolmam in my house gallivantin' in the moonlight and rain—spoonin' ya can bet, disgraceful-like out there, for fifteen or thirty." He coughed, choked with the smoke.

"Damn this smoke. It's the damp holdin' it down."

He opened the door, but the smoke was banked in by the thick white mist outside.

"Dark as a well out," he said, "and her out in it gettin' wet. Even coyotes is in their holes nights like this. . . . I'll show that hussy something. . . . Hussy is what she is."

There was no answer from the other voice in the smoke fog. Old Lange took a paper and sat to the table. He drew the lamp nearer.

Mrs. Lange called the three youngest children and went into the room where they and Mr. Lange slept. Soon after, he finished looking over a farm paper and followed them.

It was much later when Mary Maticka felt her way into the kitchen and across to her room. She stumbled against nothing; she seemed to see in the night as in the day. But in the room she lit the lamp and adjusted the paper shade. There fell a round shower of light on the floor near the dresser. She dropped a string of brown beads into a drawer and began to pull off her clothes.

"Is that you, Mary?" called Mr. Lange.

There was no answer.

She slipped into a full flannel gown and climbed over Judy into the bed.

Well, Old Lange could wait for a chance to show his authority. His chance would come; a good one; it always had.

The Friday night of the first week in November, Mary Maticka went with John Brindly in the spring wagon to a dance in the Richards' soddy. The night was lighted by an orange moon which draped the hills with mauve and silver veils, cool, perfumed. The tumbleweeds, big as cart wheels, rolled over the hills in slow chase. Once the wagon scared up a flock of prairie chickens that glistened in the moonlight like silver birds. They scudded a hundred feet ahead and settled in a thicket of sagebrush and soapweed. A rabbit kept jumping ahead of the wagon for a half mile.

John began to sing an old song of the early sand-hillers.

"Don't ask me my name,
An old bachelor I am,
But I'll tell all the same
I've a very good plan;
You'll find me out West
On Goose Creek plain
A starving to death
On a government claim."

Mary wondered about his being a man of the hills. She had wondered a great deal about John. She went to parties like this one with him. He was a part of the hills, of course—a very human part, but forever and ever? What would he have been in the packing houses? Like them? Was he a product of the hills, an accident with them? Did he find in them a sort of completion of himself—a part that one couldn't phrase, or talk about to others, but a consummation that another might understand?

Did the hills hold that something for John which was more than the cattle of his father's hills, more than the little patch of short, dried corn that rattled so hauntingly like something starved, lifeless, like a scarecrow; more than three meals a day, and a bed at night? Had he given something to the hills as she had? And had he taken something from them as she had? Something one couldn't really talk about, nor cry over, but be happy for?

He looked at Mary, who was crouched in the wagon seat. He sang again.

"I've something sweet to tell you,
The secret you must keep.
Now remember when I tell it,
I'm talking in my sleep."

"Do you know that one, Mary? Like it?" he asked.

Mary made no answer.

John broke in again as though he were talking with her for the first time.

"I want to get out of here. I want to go to Wyoming where I can take more land and a better lot of it, too. There's nothing here, really. One can't even stir the sand or it becomes alive and blows away. I'm tired of it."

"Nothing here?"

"You—of course, and that's everything. But even we couldn't get on well here."

"And there's nothing more—nothing that makes you bigger, happier, really glad?"

"Well, I like that in you, Mary, and that's why. . . . Other girls don't see and feel that way. . . . I suppose what you see in the hills I see in you. But gee whiz, Mary, it's you, not the hills. . . . The hills in you. . . . That's funny, isn't it?" With soft laughter he ridiculed himself. "But we can't die here, Mary."

"Die?" she repeated. "I'm just beginning to live."

"Oh," said John.

"Yes," Mary answered him.

John looked at Mary veiled in soft dark shadows of the night and talking low and sweetly like a sleeper. There was nothing awake in Mary to which he could now appeal; it was gone.

Mary knew now that John didn't smell the mint and dry grass of the hay flats, didn't hear the crunching of the sand on the road, didn't see the low-sailing birds scudding away like silent silver ships when the wagon rumbled past, didn't see the white, burning stars.

John felt Mary's withdrawal. He didn't understand, but he felt it was final. He thought he would like to see a light in a window. He called to the team and slapped them on the flanks with the reins. They took up a trot, and the wagon rumbled on.

Finally they reached the sod shanty of the Richards. It was two-roomed. The dance was in the larger, which was almost cleared. On the table, pushed to the corner, were two lamps which made huge shadows that doubled and doubled like wind-blown giants, that bent on the walls, and piles of cakes, sandwiches that were thick and from which hung edges of pink meat filling, and cups and saucers in towers a foot high.

The room was hot, filled with a dozen or more perspiring women and girls, whose waists were drawn tight across full breasts. They sat in a row of chairs along one side of the room, waiting for the men and for the music. There were some men and boys in the room, coatless, clustered in a corner. Some were whispering, and a few would laugh twitteringly. But most of them were wide-eyed and silent like the women, and stared unseeing toward the piles of sandwiches and cups and saucers.

There was a call for the groups outside. They came in and hung about the doorway. The fiddler sawed on his fiddle, screeching, scraping, like a knife cleaning a pot.

A yellow-haired young fellow mounted a chair, stooping to avoid the ceiling. Then he began, "All join hands en circle to the left."

The dancing began, mechanically, not gladly. There was a shuffle, shuffle of feet, few laughs, serious faces. A haze of dust arose and hung about the floor as high as the knees of the dancers. The light played on it and made golden shafts. The shuffle, shuffle; the sawing, sawing, sawing, of the fiddle; the dull thudding of the fiddler's heel beating time. The dust rose to the low ceiling and the merrymakers' noses burned dry with it.

It was a jolly evening for Mary, handsome, warm, whirling and whirling in the dust-built cloud that glistened like powdered gold.

There were few pauses between dances. The merriment was running in whirling circles, gay halos in bright dust. The dancers circled and circled and slowed in their circling only when there was a cherry-red flush in the east.

About four o'clock that morning, Mary Maticka jumped down from the wagon seat and after a word of good-bye to John went into the Langes'.

At seven she answered Mr. Lange's vigorous pounding on her door. Through breakfast he did not say a word to her. He scowled at his wife a great deal. But she came and went with griddle cakes, vacantly, as though moved by springs.

When Mary was pushing her chair from the table he said, "I wouldn't give twenty-five cents for a schoolmam that'd go to them damn dances."

He chuckled over saying that. He had 'em now. He'd rid the district and his house of this hussy, and his woman would be busy and decent as she used to be. A horsewhipping was what they needed. It'd stir them up, keep them straight in their harness. Anyway there'd be no more of this. He had them both now.

Mary looked at him a moment, a little curiously, with eyes black and living with the whole of her being. All the light in the room was sinking into her eyes. Mr. Lange zigzagged his chair on its rear legs. Mary said nothing and left.

He brought a hard fist down on the table. The dishes clattered and rattled. Then the house was still. Mrs. Lange did not come in from the kitchen. But he meant business. He'd had enough of this Mary Maticka, plenty enough of her and of his mooning woman.

In the school, before the arrival of any of the children, Mary was lifting the cover of her desk. She felt a shadow and turned to the door. Old Lange stood framed there, against the white glare of the sun. He threw a wad of paper at her desk. It fell on the floor before her. Mary's eyes stayed on the shadow. Old Lange saw them and his lips moved. He had cursed those eyes many times before. Now he cursed the eyes, the orange jacket, the black hair. Anyway he really had her now. He'd damn them and save his mooning woman.

Mary saw him turn and hurry across the schoolyard. For a moment he stopped in the fireguard, a strip of upturned soil four feet wide that squared the schoolyard, then hurriedly made up the hill. He became smaller and smaller, sinking below the horizon like a little grey ship on the sea.

She picked up the paper which was folded to the size of a postage stamp. Unfolding it, she read:

> "You been here long enough and you
> can hunt another boarding place.
> H. G. Lange."

She put the note into her pocket. It burned there all morning. At noon she went to the Langes' soddy. Mrs. Lange was in a chair at the table; Mr. Lange was away.

The woman turned her head as Mary entered.

"I don't understand this, Mrs. Lange—this note, I mean."

"Well, I understand," she said. "And you won't leave, I tell you. I understand; I've always understood."

Mary stood with her hands thrust hard in the pockets of the orange jacket. She saw the woman's tousled hair, the tightened muscles in her face and arms, the red flame on one cheek; she heard the labored words; she knew that Mrs. Lange had been beaten and whipped by her man. The woman was one sore.

"It ain't so much the dance as that cross with the watch-glow stuff on it, and your beads, and most of all you liking to walk witch-like on Hog-back Ridge when it's pitch dark, he says. They's stories out ain't true. . . . It's 'cause you're different, and like sunflowers . . . that's it. . . . And I like them . . . sunflowers . . . I understand, I tell you. . . . But he's going to leave, if you don't go. And I says I'm leaving if you do. And he found this and said you're loose and crazy and ain't moral."

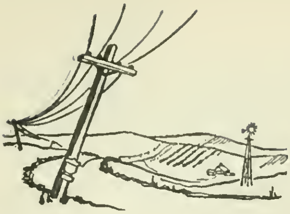
She held out to Mary a yellow piece of paper.

Dunes of my land; hot sands, metallic flashes—
blind me out. Full, rich hills of yellow, gold,
below blue sky. You tell me you are a child
unborn, a land of a tomorrow.
Fateful dunes of sand, cutting, churning, blinding,
binding earth to sky and sky to earth. Crowding,
capricious slaves of winds that weave corded
fields, seas of molded waves. Living not a day;
dancing to death with weather's play.

"And he said that's dirty . . . *child unborn,* and you a schoolmam. . . . And I told him I like it . . . and it was poetry-like, contrary to rime and the like. . . . And he saw me on Hog-back Ridge last night, like you."

"You walked on Hog-back Ridge?"

"And he said first thing he knowed I'd have a John up there too, for all the sand-hill country to see. But I told him the hills is enough."



Rooster Fight

Wayne Gard

CARS in an irregular line follow the crooked side road that cuts through sandy soil and leads into the oak woods. Custom-built limousines and battered lizzies—all are headed for the same destination. Drivers not familiar with the road watch for strips of white rag tied to fences and bushes. These simple markers show the way to the cocking main.

The trail ends at a low building with cars parked in front, under the trees. The clubhouse is cheaply constructed, with board walls, a galvanized iron roof, and a dirt floor, for who knows when some new sheriff or prosecuting attorney may take a notion to get into the limelight by trying to enforce the state law against cockfighting?

It is still early, for Sunday morning, and the men stand about conversing in small groups beneath the trees. Here a stockbroker and a man whose oil wells would sell for half a million rub shoulders with farmers in corduroy pants and leather jackets. A village barber in high-heeled cowboy boots jokes with a couple of doctors who have escaped telephone calls for a day. A teacher from a jerkwater college, here for the first time, reminds himself defensively that the Welsh used to hold cockfights in churchyards and that Henry the Eighth and George Washington and even Grover Cleveland were patrons of the sport.

Some of the visitors have driven a hundred miles or more since daybreak. They talk mostly about next Sunday's mains. These events are advertised by word of mouth; seldom are they mentioned in newspaper sports pages.

"We're going to have another little main up in the woods at Garland next Sunday," a genial breeder announces. "I hope you boys can come."

"Gosh, I'd like to," someone answers, "but next Sunday I'm going up to Chickasha to see that big fight between Dallas and Oklahoma City. There's going to be fast shuffling and big money. Those Dallas birds ought to be in good shape; they're going to take 'em up by plane."

"Guess I'll have to go up there too," another puts in. "I want to see that new clubhouse at Chickasha. They say it seats four or five hundred and has a second pit so that when a fight drags too long a new match can get going at the same time. It'll be a long drive, but what's two hundred miles when there's a good main at the other end?"

Soon two handlers appear from the chicken houses, each with a game cock under his arm. The men then file into the clubhouse, a few stopping to take swigs from hip flasks. At the door each exchanges a dollar and a half for a tag with a number stamped on it. In some places, where law enforcement is more strict, each spectator is given a badge stating that he is a member of the club and that his dues are paid to date. Some of the patrons, accustomed to fifty-cent or dollar pits, crab a little at the price; but this main is expected to be unusually good.

There will be sixteen matches today. Three hack fights between birds owned by some of the smaller breeders near-by will be preliminary to the thirteen-match main between a Corsicana breeder and one from Austin. As the spectators seat themselves on the three tiers of pine planks about the pit, the two handlers carry their birds into the ring, which is twenty-one feet across, and the referee follows.

The pit has an earthen floor and a low canvas wall. It is well lighted from a skylight directly above, but before the main is ended it may be necessary to turn on the big electric lamps that hang from the rafters.

The two game cocks, beautiful in their plumage of black and gold, peck eagerly at each other as the handlers hold them close to whet their appetite for blood. They have had no food this morning, and for two weeks have been penned up and deprived of female company. A week ago they were given workouts with chamois muffs on their spurs. Today their combs are trimmed closely, and they are heeled with steel gaffs.

These bayonet-like weapons, two and a quarter inches long, convert into deadly duels what otherwise might be little more than barnyard scuffles. The gaffs are made by hand and cost twenty to twenty-five dollars a pair. Shorter gaffs are used in the North, while in some places, especially below the Rio Grande, cockers occasionally use an extremely deadly type of gaff, called the slasher, which is sharpened on the sides as well as at the tip.

Before each match starts, the referee weighs the cocks at the edge of the pit. Most of the birds balance the scales at five pounds or a little more. Customary rules stipulate that birds matched with each other must not vary more than two ounces in weight.

Bets are shouted back and forth across the pit as the match is about to start. Most of the men risk only five or ten dollars on each of the hack fights; they are saving for the main.

"Get ready," the referee calls; and the handlers place their birds on lines facing the center of the ring and about six feet from each other.

"Pit your birds!" he says a few seconds later, watch in hand. The handlers let go their fowls, and the cocks rush at each other like demons, pecking and clawing and beating with their wings. "Watch 'em shuffle!" the fans shout from all sides.

Soon one gaff makes a strike, and the cocks are entangled. "Handle," the referee calls, and the two men pull out the steel spur, untangle the birds, and take them back to the lines for the second pitting of the match. Both birds are panting from heat and excitement; the handlers blow on them to cool them off. The right wing of one cock is broken and bleeding, but he is still game.

Again the two cocks rush at each other, half running, half flying. This time the Roundhead with the broken wing gets his gaff into his enemy. "He's got a rattle," backers of the stuck bird say hopelessly as he is carried back to the side of the pit. The gaff has gone through his back into his lungs, and he is coughing up blood.

The handler wipes the bloody head with a wet cloth and holds a finger in the cock's beak to help him breathe, but most of the fight has gone out of him. In the next pitting he makes only feeble resistance, and in a few moments he is carried off dead.

While the cocks are being heeled for the next match, most of the spectators step out for a breath of fresh air and maybe another swallow of rye. One corner of the building has a lunch counter where barbecue sandwiches and soft drinks are sold. In another is a crap table that is kept busy between matches. A wood-burning stove stands in the center of the floor, but it won't be needed today. The walls are bare except for a big sign that reads: "The rules of this club are the simple rules that govern the conduct of gentlemen everywhere."

Soon the handlers come back with fresh birds, and the battles go on—pitting after pitting, match after match. Sometimes two or three clinches are enough; other matches drag on for fifteen or twenty minutes.

Joe's Corsicana cock loses the first match of the main, but then his luck turns and he begins winning. Soon the odds are in his favor. "Five to four on Joe's bird," two or three men shout at once, and the offers are taken quickly. "A hundred to sixty on Joe," yells another, made reckless by excitement and liquid warmth.

"Come on, Joe!" Shouts rise from all sides as the cocks begin sparring or shuffling. "Hit 'im, Gus! Get in with both feet!"

Sometimes the losing cock is game enough to fight until the last breath is gone. Sometimes he wearies slowly and is counted out. Not one runs away from the fight, though such conduct is not unknown. Two cocks in turn become coupled—receiving wounds in the back which paralyze their legs—but they fight on as best they can. Another is blinded and can't rush at his foe, but he still makes feathers fly when he gets within range.

The most spectacular match ends suddenly when the two whirring birds flash at each other like lightning, colliding three feet in the air. When they hit the ground, one bird is dead.

"I believe that's the highest I ever saw 'em fly," the referee comments as the birds are carried off. Cocks of English strain sometimes fly as high as four feet, but the Indian birds are foot fighters. Telling of unusual matches he has witnessed, the referee mentions a Kentucky fight in which both cocks became frightened and ran neck and neck about the pit, each trying to get away from the other. In another fight, the cocks knocked each other in the head simultaneously and both fell dying.

Now there are no more odds. After winning the first match and then losing five straight, Gus begins to win again. He brings on heavier and quicker cocks until most of Joe's backers have no more money to offer. Except for an occasional yellow bird, the cocks look pretty much alike in their plumage of black, brown, and gold. Most of them are Roundheads or Whitehackles or Rangers. At the next main, there may be Redquills or Shawlnecks or Arkansas Travelers.

Never a word is spoken against the decisions of the referee. He isn't called on for hairline judgments, but if he were, his word would go. He is one of the best-known breeders in the country. His birds have won at the big main at Orlando, Florida, and in many other states. Right now he has in his pens one bird that has brought in more than $10,000.

At last the odds turn in favor of the Austin birds. Gus has won five straight. He makes it six and, with his initial victory, wins the main. The cockers decide to fight the shake, and their handlers bring in some heavyweight birds. This last match drags a bit, but each cock fights gamely to win or die, exhibiting the valor and persistence which Themistocles intended to inspire in his soldiers when he stopped them to witness a cockfight as they marched against the Persians.

In Texas as elsewhere, cockfighting has been suppressed by law—only to crop out again. Counting the little battles in the woods, the state probably has nearly a thousand mains in a single cocking season, which lasts from Thanksgiving until July 4. One county in Texas is said to have more than two hundred breeders of game cocks.

The sport has spread over the whole country. Mains are held in the Sierras, along the Rio Grande, at Little Rock and Memphis, and even in New England. At least one has been fought on the roof of a New York skyscraper, and others are within easy range of Washington—though they are no longer patronized by Presidents, as in Jackson's day. The big main between the two Carolinas dates from colonial times. The industry supports several magazines, and fortunes are made by successful breeders.

As in earlier days, many people condemn the sport as cruel; but cockers defend it as being no more barbarous than angling. Some fishermen, declares one patron of the pits, "think there is no greater sport than hanging a hook in the mouth of a black bass or a rainbow trout and watching him struggle to death in an effort to get away." If the fisherman answers that his prey is used as food, the cocker points to a group of Negroes who watch the coops from a discreet distance. "Why did these darkies come to the scene of battle, except to carry off the vanquished birds for Sunday dinners?"

The mains vary in length, the more important ones running to twenty-one matches. Some are fought in woods pastures, with leafy branches for a roof and logs for seats. Others are held in tents or barns or in clubhouses above corner saloons. In one town a pit has been made in an abandoned hall of the Ku Klux Klan. But many special clubhouses have been constructed, and some of these are as luxurious as the royal cockpit at Whitehall Palace, where Queen Elizabeth and the Stuarts watched the spirited shuffling and slashing of an earlier century.

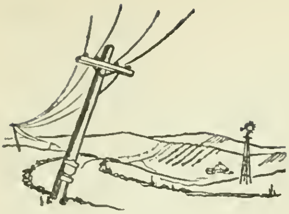
Those who like to bet can lose their money as quickly on cockfights as on horse races. In the big mains wagers sometimes go as high as $5,000 on a single match and $10,000 on the main. One may learn a great deal about judging cocks for speed and gameness, but the element of chance is always important. A cock down on his back may give a vicious slash and kill his opponent. Or one that looks like a winner may awkwardly cut his own throat. The experienced fan doesn't pay his bet until the birds are carried out.

KANSAS CITY

John Gould Fletcher

Fired by a fierce electric energy,
Caught from the prairie in a thunderous mood,
Through rivers and long trails that woke the blood,
We poised these pale towers here against the sky;
Where men from rolling heights might yet descry
Them, where for long beside the bluffs once stood
Only a river-landing whence the flood
Of ox-trains straggled west, the plains to try.

So, not as symbol of a luck-fraught dream,
Nor as a boast, where boasting is made vain,
But as a gate where hopes grew sparse and single,
The wheel-rut in the dust, the slow-curved stream,
These towers stand; to mark for men again
The far trail to the West, where thew and thong commingle.



Four Eagle

Elizabeth H. Middleton

THE SUN rose red out of the ocean and began its daily round, lighting the land with long-spreading, searching fingers. It passed over the ridge of mountains to the Ohio and the broad richness of the Mississippi Valley cornfields, and at last came to the Great Plains and the Fort Hunter Reservation. There it seemed to rise anew, leaping out of the dust blood-red, flooding the barren prairie with rich light, till it stood high in the clear blue of the sky, a white-hot ball too brilliant for the eye to look upon. It beat down on a small log house nestled in a hollow at the crest of a rise of ground, where an old man slept in the doorway.

Four Eagle felt the sun's heat through his blanket and slowly opened his eyes and turned cautiously over on his side. He could see down to the river where layers of cool moist air pressed to its bosom like a veil, which lifted with the upward sweep of the sun. He sat up and rubbed his knees to ease the stiffness, and peered into the dim interior of the house to see if the children were still asleep. The mounds of their blankets lay quiet, only a slight rise and fall indicating their rhythmic breathing. He stood up to stretch. Yawning widely, he stepped out into the yard.

His eyes, filmy with age, roamed over the expanse of plains. He thought, with a pang of sorrow, how much it had changed. He could still remember it as it had been in his father's day, in his own childhood. Then the grass had stood waist-deep in the coulees, rippling like waves of water in the steady wind; game was ripe for the taking; and smoke rose high from the lodges at daybreak. He remembered the buffalo that had roamed in herds so vast no man could see from one end of them to the other. Then the people had laughed and feasted. They were plump and fat and well oiled with buffalo grease. Even the dogs were fat, and the puppies for the kettles were sweet and succulent as marrow. How—Oah! Oah! He sighed heavily. Desolation and drought and dust and barrenness and scorching, searing winds. He picked up his fan made of a turkey's wing and sat down in the doorway. A lean yellow bitch, her ribs showing like wire through the flesh, came up and licked his mocassins. Several puppies followed her, pulling at her dugs.

Sitting there, in the bright peace of early morning, he thought about the three children, Harvey, Rosie, Lyle. He cringed at the white men's names his daughter had given them. Secretly, he had given them other names more fitting; but these he had never told to anyone, not even to the children. They had come to him in a dream, and now he turned them over in his mind, savoring their pleasant, secret sound. The three children were all the family that was left to him; all his wives were dead or had left him; even the daughter who had borne these children was dead. In the dim blue shadow of his age he held fast to the three, the last of his blood, determined that nothing should part them from him.

After a while he heard soft stirring sounds and got up and went into the house. The children were tumbling out of their blankets, rubbing their eyes sleepily. He picked up the youngest, Lyle, and carried him outside where a bucket of cool water stood against the wall. Very gently he washed the child's face and dried it with a towel that hung on a nail. The yellow bitch came to lap the water in the pail and he kicked her away. She gave a shrill yelp and lay down to lick herself. Harvey came out, wincing in the strong light. His grandfather, watching him, thought how like he was to the straight young saplings that grew in the river bottoms. He had black eyes and the straight hair of his race; his nose was straight and long; his skin was the color of bronze. In the old days he would have been a fine hunter and a raider of enemy horses. Instead he must go to the white man's school, and his eyes were poor. The lids were red and swollen, and there were grains like coarse sand under them. Rosie followed her brother. She was like a young doe, a she-deer, supple, swift, alert. They were indeed fine children, and his pride in them was enormous. How unlike they were to the children of that Lizzie Bearcub who lived in the house down the coulee! Lizzie had married a black man. Her children had broad noses, and lips so thick they curled over, and the hair on their heads was like the wool of a mountain sheep. Lizzie lived alone now, but she came often to Four Eagle's house. She was noisy and quarrelsome. She wanted to live with him. He, thinking of that black one she had had before, did not want her.

The day grew hotter. Dancing waves of heat shimmered like steam from the ground. Across the river the red-and-brown slashed bluffs and gullies of the Bad Lands were obscure and misty. Lyle climbed onto his grandfather's lap and played with the old man's braids. With a small fat finger he traced the deepening lines of the seamed brown face. A deep sense of contentment filled Four Eagle. He was at peace on his own land, living in his own house free from interference, and his children were clustered like wild partridges about him. His old eyes loved the sight of them darting back and forth, and his ears delighted in their shrill voices. He closed his eyes happily and fanned himself.

When he opened them again at a startled cry from Rosie, it was to see Lizzie Bearcub toiling up the hill, and he knew, with a desperate sinking sensation at the pit of his stomach, that there was no escape from her. Lyle slid off his lap and eased into the house.

Lizzie stood before him, smiling. She had decked herself in a clean dress of some thin stuff with a bright pattern of flowers on it, and her hair, which was still black and glossy, was coiled neatly in the nape of her neck. Lizzie was enormous. Great rolls of fat encased her arms, and a slab of it hung like an apron on her belly. Her face quivered downwards into a cataract of chins, all of them dripping with sweat. Her smile broadened, and the odor of the dead came from her cavernous mouth where two or three foul snags stuck like posts in her gums. Four Eagle shuddered in distaste. Ugh! He liked fat women, but not this one. He pretended to be unaware of her presence for as long as possible.

She opened the bag that hung over her arm. "I will cook you a fine dinner," she said. "Look, nice fat puppy."

He half rose to his haunches and lifted his head like a hound, swallowing to be rid of the sudden rush of water in his mouth. Then he sat back again, his buttocks smacking the ground.

"Go on home, you old hag," he said sternly. "You are less than nothing to me. Your dogs are lean." He cast an appreciative eye at the fat puppies in his own dooryard. "You are a bad cook besides, and you eat too much. Go home, and leave me in peace."

She crossed her great arms. "Why do you always send me away? You have no other woman?"

He returned no answer.

"No, for no other woman would have you. Your braids are thin and grey, and there is no fire in you any more. You do nothing but sit in the doorway and sleep. But I will stay with you. I am a good cook, and I can keep your house clean."

His eyes were like glass. "I want no woman, only the children."

Her voice grew harsh. "I have worked for the white people, and I have learned many things about how to keep a house. You had better watch out. Have you so soon forgotten what happened to Old Rock?"

"What has he to do with me?"

"He had no woman. His house was not clean and his children went in rags. Where are those children now?"

In the silence that followed he remembered how the children of Old Rock had been taken from him, placed in a school so that they never saw their home again, never felt the freedom of the endless plains and the touch of wind on their faces. It was the nurse who had done it, that dried-up thing who had no home of her own to tend to. She had put in a complaint, and then the agent had come with signed papers. Old Rock was helpless against them. Four Eagle stared in front of him. Surely, he thought, such a thing could not happen to him! He could feel Lizzie's eyes piercing his silence.

"Well? Have you heard nothing then? How that thin one, that nurse, has spoken of you to the agent?"

"You lie," he said. "It is not so."

She shrugged. "I have heard of it. You will see."

"I do not believe you. Go home. The sight of you offends me."

Deep color flushed her dark cheeks. "Some day you will beg me to come. Then perhaps it will be too late, you old one. There are other men I can have, younger men, with fire in their blood."

"Then why have you not taken them? Because none of them will have you. They have not forgotten that other one you had, nor is there a single one who would take his place in the bed beside you. Go now. I am done with you, nor do I ever wish to lay my eyes on you again."

He closed his eyes and lapsed into silence, knowing that if he said no more, she would at last go home. He leaned back against the house, feeling the warmth of the logs on his back. The sun on his face was hot and clear, and the air pungent with the smell of sage.

She puffed angrily, muttering to herself. Then she closed her bag, and was gone. He could hear her retreating footsteps. The vague sense of pressure and discomfort that had oppressed him during her visit lifted. He felt light and free as a soaring hawk. He felt sure that what she had said was meant only to frighten him. The children who had been very quiet while the woman was there, began to laugh and chatter again. He spoke to them once, for the sheer pleasure of hearing them answer him. Then, as easily as a baby, he slipped into sleep.

He was awakened by the soft swish of tires in the dust, and the squeak of a brake. His head jerked, and his eyes flew open to see a government car with two people in it. He recognized them instantly, with a tingle of fear slipping down his spine. One was the nurse, Miss Lovejoy. She was a small thin thing with harsh, faded red hair, and her nose, which was pink around the nostrils, twitched exactly like a rabbit's. The other, a tall erect man with the carriage of an army officer, was the agent. He bore himself as one in authority, which, indeed, he was, being second on the reservation only to the superintendent. The two of them slowly approached the old man.

He forced a smile to his lips, said, "Hot, very hot," and picked up his turkey wing. He did not know what they had come for. He waited, leaving the first move to them.

"Where's Harvey?" the nurse asked, her voice as thin as her body. "I want to see Harvey."

Four Eagle waved his hand vaguely. "He is here."

The agent cleared his throat. "Four Eagle, the superintendent has asked me to inspect your house. I am sorry. You will not mind?"

The old man said nothing, and the agent's face grew slightly red. He ran a finger around his collar and glanced hastily at Miss Lovejoy.

She spoke up without hesitation. "I have had to report you, Four Eagle. The children have been coming to school in torn clothes. Their faces are not washed, and they are too thin. Then Harvey's eyes are bad. He is supposed to report for treatment with the rest, but he does not come. We can't allow that. He is infectious. He must take his treatments."

"He says you hurt him. He does not like it." He saw that her hands were harsh and red, with short blunt fingers. He thought how it would feel to have those hands on his eyes, turning back the lids, pouring on them a searing liquid that burned like fire.

"The law says he must have the treatments."

"He does not like it."

The woman pushed past him rudely. "I haven't all day to argue with you. Come, Mr. Barnes, I want you to see this house. This is where these children have to live."

A dull fury suffused Four Eagle. What right had these strange people to come into his house? What right had they to say how he should treat his own grandchildren? He stood in the doorway and watched them, glaring. The children, sensing drama, came up behind him and peered in, too. The nurse was darting about the single room, lifting blankets, rubbing her fingers over the table, prying into corners, lifting the lid of a box.

"You see?" she was saying to her companion. "What did I tell you? Filthy, absolutely filthy!"

She darted to the door, brushing past Four Eagle, and seized Rosie by the arm. "Look, Mr. Barnes. Just come and look at this child." Rosie writhed and squirmed in her grasp and at last wrenched free, but the woman only spun around, pouncing on Lyle like a cat. "Just look at him. See how he's dressed. Why, this man can't take care of children. It's even worse than I thought." Her red hand dove claw-like into the thick blackness of Lyle's head. "I knew it!" Her voice held a ring of triumph. "He has head lice. Why, Four Eagle, you're not caring for these children at all. They're as bad as Old Rock's family; even worse. I shall certainly put in a report to the superintendent immediately. You'll bear me out, Mr. Barnes?"

The agent hesitated. "I wouldn't be too hasty, Eva. After all, you can't just butt into other people's affairs, especially these older Indians."

Miss Lovejoy interrupted him, her thin lips held together in a tight line. "I shall see the superintendent personally about this. It will be far better to have these children put into a boarding school where they can be properly cared for."

Four Eagle felt a sudden sickness within, a wave of nausea and a weakness in his belly. He doubled up like one in pain, and dropping his fan, held on to himself with both hands while he rocked back and forth on his heels. His voice rose in a piercing wail, and then followed a torrent of words. But the two who stared at him, astonished, understood not a word. On and on he went, punctuating his speech with gestures. The children stared at him in frank admiration. Finally they began to snicker and nudge one another. Rosie broke into open laughter.

"What's he saying?" Miss Lovejoy's chin jutted out at a sharp angle from her scrawny neck. "What's he saying?"

Rosie eyed her warily, backing safely away. "He says no one but a fool makes so much of a stir about so small a thing as a louse. He says"—only her head could be seen now around the corner of the house—"he says, you are nothing but a dried-up old she-dog that can bring forth no young." She disappeared, and they could hear the shrill sound of her laughter.

A dead silence followed, glaring and hot and blue from the brightness of the sun beating down on them. The little group were like statues. The nurse was the first to move. She turned on her heel and marched to the car. Her face was a mottled dark red color, and her lower lip was caught in her teeth. She climbed in, her slate-like eyes fixed on the dust ahead. The fingers of her hands twisted like snakes in her lap, and a single wisp of stiff red hair hung untidily in front of her face. The line of her back was as rigid as steel.

The agent glanced briefly at Four Eagle, his eyes quizzical. He made a simple, eloquent gesture with his hands, throwing them outwards, palms up. Then, with a little shrug, he, too, got into the car and started it down the hill.

When they were gone, the sun seemed to go behind a cloud, though actually it was still shining the same as ever. Four Eagle sat down in the doorway again; but nothing was the same. Even the logs against his back were cold, and, shivering, he pulled a blanket about his shoulders. He could understand very well now why the old women pulled a shawl over their heads when someone died. He wished that he might do the same, and, safe in its seclusion, indulge his bleeding sorrow.

He became aware of the children's eyes fastened on him. Lyle crept close. His hands were sticky from a piece of candy he had found. His grandfather took him on his lap and held him very close. His eyes filmed with tears, so that he saw the familiar outline of the child blurred, the head that was so hard and round, the long bold sweep of the nose, the slanted forehead. And this was the one they would take from him, to place him in a school. He would not then learn the ways of his own people. Aliens, strange ones, would have him in their charge, and they would turn him against his own grandfather. Four Eagle was old. The lust for battle had died in him. He felt only an aching, numbing pain. Against the new ways he could not fight, even if he chose. He knew well enough the power that dwelt in the nurse, the agent, the superintendent, above all in the White Father at Washington, who would listen not to him, Four Eagle. Not even a whole tribe could win against them. How, then, a single man, and he an old one?

That night the children under their blankets were as soft-breathing logs, but the old man rose from his bed on the floor and stepped outside. All about him was the vast peace of night, living stars that had looked down on his people and dwelt with them as friends for so many years, the river that was a dark line in the silvery dimness of night, the plains that he knew as he knew his own house. He had seen this same scene with delight many times, but this time it brought no peace. The cool dampness of the air did not ease the hotness of his forehead, nor could it quiet the sense of impending emptiness and desolation that weighed on him.

Down the hill, nestled at the bottom of the coulee, was the house of Lizzie Bearcub. A light still burned, shining out through the polished glass of the windows. He turned his back on it and went into the house, and gathering Lyle into his arms, lay down again. Gradually the soft warmth of the child's body made him drowsy. He slept, dreaming of happier days, and when he woke it was to find the sun risen high in the sky. The mists on the river were gone. The plains glittered in burning heat, their image reflected in horizontal bands of waves like mirrors. He woke with a sensation of heavy oppressiveness, but for a few minutes he could not remember the cause of it. Then abruptly it all came back, and the pain in his stomach returned so that he doubled up with it. The children, who had been awake already, stared at him, their eyes round. Like frightened wild things they crept close.

"We won't go," they chorused in shrill defiance. "We won't let them take us away."

But he, who was older and wiser than they and had seen many things, shook his head. He got up and prepared food, knowing all the time that "they" would come again.

It was afternoon, and the white-hot sun blistered slowly on his westward way, when Four Eagle first spied the approaching cloud of dust that betokened the agent's car. He straightened his shoulders and waited their coming with dignity. The three children stood close to him. Lyle began to cry; Rosie's eyes snapped dangerously; Harvey, like his grandfather, maintained a silent stiff-backed dignity.

The nurse got out of the car and came towards them, wearing a look of smug triumph as a woman wears a shawl.

"Well," she said, even her voice expressing satisfaction, "I have talked with the superintendent. He quite agrees with us. We have come to tell you that you must have the children ready for us on Friday."

Four Eagle felt Lyle's fingers tighten on his own, Harvey moved a step closer, and Rosie let out a little gasp.

"We won't go to your old school," she cried.

"I'm afraid you'll have to." Miss Lovejoy smiled mechanically. "We know what is best for you."

"I won't, I won't!" Rosie stamped her foot, and then opened her mouth in a piercing wail. She seized her grandfather's hand. "Don't let them take me; don't make me go." Then in a torrent of words in the Assiniboin, she begged and pleaded with him, pulling his hand, crying, flinging her arms wildly.

The agent turned his head away, and showed a sudden intense interest in a pellet of dried mud just to the left of his boot.

"Surely you know, Four Eagle, that we only mean to do well by the children. We don't want to deprive you of them. But we must think first of them, the younger generation. We do not blame you. We know you are an old man, that you have no woman with you to take care of things."

"Woman?" The old man flung back his head like a horse brought up suddenly on a checkrein. "Does a woman then make such a difference?"

"Well . . ."

"My daughter is dead, and my wives are all gone. What have I now to do with a woman?" He pulled all three of the children close in the slim shelter of his arms. "These are all that is left to me. Would you take them away?"

The nurse nodded briskly. "Since you won't take care of them, yes."

"No!" His voice rose in quavering defiance. "You shall not take them."

"We have papers signed by the superintendent. We will come with the police, if necessary, and it won't do you any good to try and hide them. You might as well make up your mind to it right now."

She turned abruptly and went back to the car. The agent followed her reluctantly, walking slowly with his head bent.

"If only there were some other way. I don't like to do this. I've always felt we made a mistake with Old Rock." He shook his head sadly.

"Wait." It was Four Eagle, calling after him. "You said something just now about a woman."

"Yes?"

"If I had a woman, would that make a difference?"

Mr. Barnes glanced briefly at the nurse. "Why, yes, I suppose it would, provided she really cared for the children. But surely, Four Eagle . . ."

"You think that I am too old, that no one will have me?"

"No, no, not at all."

"You come back on Friday."

Without another word he turned into the house and waited until they had gone. He ignored the cries of the children, their questions that pelted him like stinging hail. He stood in the doorway a long time and gazed at the depressed beaten earth where the children were used to lie, at the blankets that covered them every night. He saw the tin cups that their lips had touched, strewn on the untidy table, the broom that stood in a corner and was never used. His eyes strayed to his own bed-place, a shallow depression in the earthen floor worn to the shape of his body. He kicked the blanket with his foot, thinking that this night he must make room for another, a great fat woman who had once laid herself down with a black man.

Harvey stood at his shoulder. Now that the boy was out of the glaring sun, he was able to open his eyes. They were fastened on his grandfather.

"What is this that you would do?" He spoke in Assiniboin. "Surely you would not bring that she-pig into this house?"

"What would you have me do? Would you then rather that I sent you away from me to the white man's school?"

"Oah! Oah! Is there no other way?"

"There is no other way." He pried a loose log away in a corner, and dug out a small handful of coins. "Here, you Harvey. Go down to the town and find that Minnie-Runs-in-the-Grass. Tell her I want whiskey, very much whiskey, but be careful that you do it secretly. Bring it back to me. Tonight I get very drunk."

He waited till the boy had gone, then turned to Rosie, who was watching him with quivering mouth and enormous black eyes. He bade her go out and invite his friends to a feast.

To Lyle, who was the smallest, he gave the least important errand: "Run down to that Lizzie Bearcub's house, and tell her that I have sent for her. Tell her to roll up her blanket and pack her kettles, and to bring with her much food. If she brings too little, I will send her away again."

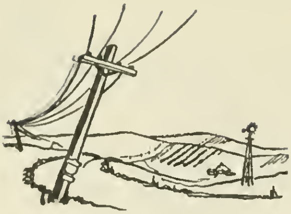
When the children were gone, he sought his favorite spot by the door. His knees hurt, and there were vague pains in his back. He leaned against the doorway with a little sigh, and picked up his turkey-wing fan. Slowly he fanned himself, back and forth, back and forth, making a small breeze of the stifling air. His eyes filmed over as he squinted at the valley. His mind, buffeted and sore, retreated into the pleasant past when the river bottoms were black with moving buffalo like an undulating carpet, and young men on ponies rode naked among them. One there was—with satisfaction he recognized himself. He had just killed a young cow, and he held her tongue in his hand. He wheeled abruptly, digging his heels into the pony's flanks. His young wife was waiting for him at their lodge. She smiled when she saw him coming, and his children stood grouped about her skirts. There were three of them, two boys and a girl. He was just about to give the tongue to his wife, when she faded away, and where she had been standing there was an empty space. He opened his eyes to see Lizzie Bearcub smiling at him. He looked past her to where the three children stood together.

BAYOU IDYL

John L. Westbrook

Since even men with two legs standing still
Were always dancing in the glare of noon,
I could not tell his hobble from the jerk
Of distant heat-waves in the cotton rows.
Yet I knew where to find him—by this oak.
No man with two legs ever stopped to eat
In shade so sparse it just diffused the sun
And made the noon hotter if anything.
At the first clang of the plantation bell
A busy scurrying emptied the fields
Till I saw through the stalks and waves of heat
A khaki limp two cotton squares away
Coming as fast as a wood peg could fumble
Across the rows and clods. He crumpled down
The way a snow man melts, and lay a minute
In boneless weariness without a word.
Then listlessly he ate his lunch, his face
Whiter than usual. The dusty sweat
Looked cold. "I get too tired sometimes," he said.
"You don't know how tired I do get sometimes.
You see, by working full speed every minute
I can pick what the others do half trying.
But there's one thing that everybody knows:
I'll go on picking cotton through the years
With half a dozen more two-legged crowds
When these are all grown up and gone to town.
I guess that's all I'm good for—picking cotton—
Because they know I won't run off to town.
Oh, I don't blame the others. I was like
That once. When I was just a little boy
I used to watch that pine hill east of here
And dream how blue and clean the streets must be
In towns the sun came from. There is, I thought,
No cotton picking there. It is all peace.
If I go east enough I shall find peace,

Where happy men live in a town like white
Sky over pines. If I go east— So I
Got up and drove all morning toward the sun
And found it overhead in Birmingham.
I worked three years with steel machines and lived
Three years in grime and hate and garlic smells—
Until a ten-ton bar fell on my leg.
I didn't bring the leg back. I just left
A smear of blue gangrene in Birmingham.
I still can feel soft sometimes between
The toes, though I do not have any toes.
Maybe you know how that is—grass and sand,
When I have just a wooden peg to feel with!
Yet I can still feel clover, green—and cooler,
On many a hot day with that leg I left
In Birmingham than with the other leg.
It does seem strange. But I'm not educated.
I just pick cotton. It's not all I might
Want life to be, and not just what I'd have
If I could dream a life first and then live it.
But there are things about it I would keep:
The smell of plowed earth in the springtime, rain,
And clean things growing. Yes, I know for sure
I'd have these in the life I'd want to live
Even if I dreamed it first. And I'm sure that
The town I never found across the hill
Would have oak leaves like these. But I don't dream now,
Not anymore as I did once. I am
Half sorry that I went to Birmingham,
Since now I cannot watch that hill the sun
Comes from, except to wonder sometimes how
A sun can rise across the pines so clean
Out of the grime and hate and garlic smells."



Good-bye to Cap'm John

S. S. Jield

MY UNCLE, Cap'm John Bell, is a big man with steady eyes. He used to look rather silly in his golfing pants, those transparent linen tights that I dare to remember him in some fifteen years ago—a man who had built up a rugged deep-water towing and dredging business when New Orleans was still a mud flat.

But he has given up the game of golf now. Now he is just rounding that big turn in the weary river, as he says, where the rest is an easy, wide swing down to salt water and the open sea. And so he sits a great deal of the time in the towing office now, looking out over the river, watching the querulous gulls with his distant eyes: the nearly deserted river since the city administration raised the docking fees to the level of the bonded indebtedness. Usually he is fiddling with something, a pencil or his watch chain, looking out at the mile of bending yellow river. He spends a lot of his time that way.

But fifteen or twenty years ago he had a number of the fancy kind of friends, among whom he was compelled to move through a period of uncomfortable collars with the silent and half-smiling suspicion of a roughshod stranger caught in the middle of a minuet.

Because fifteen or twenty years ago he had made enough money, the step into society was down, not up: a man who had generations of tugboats and train ferries and deep-sea barges named for him and for the women of his family, and with generations of river niggers in turn named for the boats. And since it is the women in a man's family who make a business of society, the godmothers of the barges managed it irrespective of his trade and thanks to its profit.

He was saddled first with one of our city's carnival organizations, one of the better ones, and so I remember him also as a prince: a massive man in button shoes, with the edge of his long underwear showing beneath the elastic of his knee breeches. It was his only carnival appearance; I was there with my mother to watch the night parade from his balcony when he dressed for that ball. "Filthy business," he said, glancing down at me once, tentative, alert; standing in massive and outlandish gravity, looking at himself. I was eleven. He always addressed me as one man to another, as a philosopher, say, to a scientific man, perhaps out of respect for my mother's brave hope or perhaps as his own subtle suggestion that I might continue my growing along masculine lines. "Not many of them seem to on your side of the family, Martha," he used to tell my mother. But standing there that night inspecting his silken bulk, we both were a little anxious. "Yes," he said.

"Yes, sir," I said.

"It's not the way I look. I look all right. But it's why I look this way." And he stared past himself in the big gold mirror. "I never wanted to get this high," he said.

He took up golf as the natural and most hardy adjunct to the launching of his family in society.

Cap'm John was in society altogether for about four years. He could have stayed there had he wished. He could have steered a carnival float down Canal Street year after year with all the papal altitude of a ferryboat captain and with about as much variety, but he got out. He gave his golf sticks to a Negro named Hopper Bell and he went back to sit in the towing office or in the wheelhouse of a seagoing tug. "Where I belong," he said. He returned to his river and to himself on the day of his third golf tournament; on the day that Frohman died. Frohman was a Negro, too.

It is not surprising that at fifty-five my uncle, Cap'm John, excelled at golf. Twenty years ago in New Orleans the game was played by a handful of elderly or ailing gentlemen who would attack the ground with the deliberation and the awkwardness and somewhat the swagger of small boys learning to chop wood, and my uncle was a larger man than most. It is less surprising that he should have excelled at the game than that he should have played it at all. Because he saw beyond that game; as though it were a bend in the river (and so it was), just as he saw beyond most things—himself, for instance. He used to confide in me in those days, and even then I must have known that he was seeing far beyond my thin legs and my eleven years, placing his confidences upon some later pinnacle to which I might one day climb or not climb. It made me walk straighter, with wider and more alert eyes. Like the thing he said one day about golf: "It is no game for you, you know," he said. "You look mighty neat today."

"No, sir," I said. "Why? Yes, sir, my stocking. . . . "

"You should have one stocking coming down," he said. "With both your stockings up you'll be a poet. Because—" he said. "Golf is a circular path. It is for old men who have nowhere to go. Going, you know; that is the thing."

"Yes, sir," I said, secretly loosening one of my pants buckles.

"But few men think of going," he said, fiddling with the golf ball and looking off. . . . I remember how he tried to tell me then about golf: about how the things a man does to excess are the measure of his soul, and how going was better than golf; how going holds something finer than the safe little positiveness of the four walls of circumstance, something better than the smallness, the immediacy of the shiny metal blades—the mashies and the niblicks whipped through the grass in pursuit of a little white ball, it also a sphere, resolving into an instant exaltation or despair. . . . "It is like the moon." He held up the golf ball. "With its little craters. Never play golf or pool . . . or bridge," he said, "and your chances will be better. Fore."

"Yes, sir," I said. He won his second golf tournament that summer.

I was in the towing office early on the day that Frohman died. I had been promised a ride on the new *Martha R. Bell* and so both of my stockings were down by the time I had run from the streetcar to the docks and up the stairs. I found Cap'm John standing at the window watching the river. "Good morning, Cap'm," I said. I sat on the high stool, hoping he would notice my stockings.

"Good morning," he said. He said it slowly. "I'm afraid we can't go today." My heart stopped for a sickening moment. "One of my niggers has been hurt," he said. "Another one. I guess we'll have to see what we can do."

"Yes, sir," I said. "What happened to him?"

"He was shot."

I whistled. "Where was he shot? How did he get shot? Who shot him, Cap'm John? What. . . . "

"I don't know," Cap'm John said. We were already descending the stairs without my noticing it.

"Will he die?" I said.

"I don't know," Cap'm John said.

"When was he shot? Today, was he? This morning?" I had to run to keep up. We were going fast and both of my stockings were well down. "Who was it, Cap'm John? Which one of them was it?"

"Frohman," Cap'm John said. "My caddy." That was when I remembered that the summer before, it had been Snag.

Snag was a crippled Negro who had caddied for my uncle when he won his first golf tournament. Cap'm John had been fond of Snag. He was fond of all Negroes, and I remember how pleased both he and Snag would be over any golf shot the two of them contrived to make; it was as though Snag carrying the golf bag and handing the stick was half of the shot without which teeing the ball and driving it could not have had any meaning whatever, and Snag would scramble along behind Cap'm John, fast, with all the keys of a grand piano displayed in his face, saying, "Wham, Cap'm Jawn, suh! Yes, suh! Us set thatun down like a fo'bits bet. Wham!" all the way to the next shot.

But Snag used to swim in the river. He believed it would help his undeveloped leg. He had a mongrel dog and the two of them would swim on warm mornings up at a great sweeping bend of levee and wilderness beyond the golf course. Sometimes when the current was gone the two of them would swim across. It was on an empty Sunday morning that Snag was killed. He hadn't seen the oil tanker when she came around the bend. They were out in the middle, then, just two black specks on the yellow vastness. Then the long blast came like a mighty trumpet. They said that the nigger must have misjudged their swing. They were already well on the turn when they saw him and they said that they eased the wheel to straighten out and pass the nigger on starboard. They said that he must have just put it to a guess and he guessed wrong because they said that he had two-thirds of the river to swim in but that he turned back and so they put the wheel hard to starboard and then he turned back again—the two of them, the nigger and the dog, swimming back and forth each time in a shorter arc until they could see his face stretched like laughter in the sunshine with all the white teeth, or like a grimace of joyous surprise, recognition, and with men even running forward, waving from the swinging cliff (she was high, empty) and the long trumpet blast right up to the moment he was struck and they wasted the life preserver. He was struck by the great bulging side, nearly amidship, as the wall of steel swung gatelike and fast with the wheel hard over. They saw only the hand and the vanishing gleam of teeth and then nothing. And now it was Frohman.

It was my first visit to a charity hospital. It must have been Cap'm John's first visit, too, for the following year he gave the Negroes a hospital of their own. "It's like the inside of a swill pot," Cap'm John said as we waited in the grimy hallway, and he began to curse them for a lot of unclean butchers. "I don't know that your mother would approve of this, and I can't say that I'd blame her. But then you may remember it; come along, then, here we go."

I remember it. Frohman had the face, the nostrils, the eyes, the color of that central figure in most stained glass windows, after the sun has gone down. He was in a ward with unwashed floor and walls among a dozen other Negroes in beds, men and women whose dumb eyes followed us in hope. The white rolling irises of Frohman's eyes spoke first when he saw Cap'm John. Then his voice came, very thin now, with a kind of gasping of the light servility and the swagger and the old meaningless effusion. "Yes, suh, Cap'm Jawn, suh. Young Cap'm, suh. I jes had to lef you know . . . how I'm is, Cap'm Jawn. Account of how me and you was gwi wham that ball in that turment tomorrow. . . . Account of how me and you was gwi. . . . "

I remember the long black hand moving on the sheet. Then the doctor came. He seemed too young and thin to be a good doctor. He was explaining the case and drawing with a scalpel on the chart. His voice seemed insolent with gaiety, so near the lean gourd head and eyes of Frohman. I dared to look once more at those eyes that saw only Cap'm John. "Altogether negligible prospects," the doctor was saying and drawing. "A split bullet. You are familiar with the stem and blossom of the tube lily? The split bullet describes that lovely plant form within the intestines; here you have the stem and here you have the blossom forming. . . . " I could feel Cap'm John looking inside of the man and waiting too long. When he spoke his voice was quiet and tightening like a warping hawser.

"What are you?" he said. "The gardener? Get this boy moved into a private room. Get out of here and get me a doctor. Get me the head surgeon, not a florist!" And the doctor had somehow vanished.

And so we stood there. It was as though Frohman and Cap'm John and I were each looking at a point somewhere within Frohman, and then it was as though the point, as we watched it, had quietly gone somewhere beyond Frohman and we watched it go, Frohman watching it too, and then our eyes stopped, Frohman's did, and Cap'm John's went on still further beyond that point which Frohman had recognized as the logical place to stop. Because the pain seemed to go out of Frohman's eyes. "Jes account of that turment tomorrow, Cap'm Jawn," he said. The shape of his head made me want to cry. "Account of how me and you was gwi wham that ball tomorrow. . . . " Cap'm John's eyes looked now at the new point, the Tomorrow of Frohman's voice, suspended somewhere in the sterile half-light above the bed where the thin profusion, the apologia in little thin strutful vowels, issued forth once more; and then it was as though the other point and this one had become the same and I saw that the corners of Cap'm John's mouth were down and the thin voice was saying, "You got to git mo' right wris' in there, Cap'm, and mind you don't lif' you haid. . . . " Then the pale irises rolled back. The pain on his face was like glory. "I ain't be cahyin yo' bag but us'll be pullin' for you, Cap'm Jawn. Me and ole Snag." He looked again, his teeth showing again. "But jes account of that turment, Cap'm Jawn . . . I be thinking if all thing don't go right . . . some kind of lil sen'-over, Cap'm, when you wins that turment. . . . Like old Snag used to say, Wham, Cap'm Jawn, suh. . . ." Then I was watching the eyes again. "Wham, Cap'm Jawn. Wham, Cap'm. Wham, Ca- . . . wham!" Then he was still looking, eagerly now, as though he were watching the flight of a ball, high and far, it too a sphere resolving into an instant exaltation or despair, but he no longer seemed to see. That is the way I remember it.

I cried on the way out. Cap'm John put his arm around me and patted my shoulder. "That," Cap'm John said, "was death. Come along, now."

And so that's how it came to be Hopper Bell's time. It was as if besides Cap'm John's sticks and his linen knickers (through which could be seen with infallible regularity, like an eccentricity in dress, the outline and even the patented seat arrangement of my uncle's underdrawers, until even his underdrawers became an incontrovertible public fact, an incident to recognition, along with his honesty, his button shoes, his size, and his job)—as if besides the sticks and the transparent tights, Cap'm John owned also a private stable of three

Negroes concomitant to his golf and graded in seniority: Snag, Frohman, Hopper Bell. And now it was Hopper Bell.

And I must say this to Hopper Bell's ghost, wherever it is: that there would have been no cheap tin trophy won by our stable that day had Cap'm John known, as I knew, about the monstrous superstition among those Negroes. Because maybe one of them helped to cart the furrowed despair of Frohman to the hospital (they took him there in an ice-wagon) and maybe Frohman (he was delirious) had had a vision; I don't know. At any rate, in the lush harangue and babble of the caddy house that day, on the heels of Frohman's death, they knew that there would be three. And now it was Hopper Bell.

He was a tall, thin-headed Negro, very black and quiet. He was beautiful, his face and his eyes and the angle of his long head which he carried to one side in a gentle manner and on the top of which he wore (with the pious placidity of a black young saint) a soiled, red bellhop's cap with brass buttons.

But I will always remember Hopper Bell's face on that day that he caddied for my uncle's last golf tournament—the wild, agonized, upgazing face with the mute velvet eyes. Perhaps it was most beautiful then; it has been stamped upon my mind in pain for such a long time. Because I was there that day of the third caddy and the third tournament. I was there and I knew and I didn't stop them. Following along in the determined little coterie of my uncle and Negroes and friends all the way around the circular path, with my stockings down and panic in my mind, I knew and I didn't stop the tournament. I didn't say, "Cap'm John, excuse me, sir, but I must talk with you alone." I didn't say, "Cap'm John, sir, please. Do with me what you will. Kill me, hate me, do anything to me, but please don't finish this tournament." And maybe that is why his face has been stamped upon my mind in pain for so long. Hopper Bell's face.

Because I was there that day, because I had to be there that day. I had to be with Cap'm John. Not on account of the tournament. On account of Frohman's death. It had bound me somehow to my uncle and I knew that I had to be with him, close to him that day and the next and the next until time and experience might slowly unite us again as child and man, restore our vast small world of interdependence which the death of a Negro had divided as with a wall of silence. Because his eyes were stronger than mine, Cap'm John's: seeing far out beyond that point where Frohman's eyes had stopped, and not coming back. And I had to have those eyes back, close to me again, to center now and then their warmth, their scrutiny, their puzzlement upon mine, and I wanted to hear once more the voice going beyond me—scouting out into the world of his experience and then returning to say, "Well what do you think of this, now?" or "What do you think of that?" And then we would be once more like two people necessary to each other. . . . It has taken me so long to understand my first death, the death of Frohman. And now I wish that we were back the way we were, Cap'm John and I; but we never can be. Too much has died; the wall of silence has gone too high.

So I was there that day. I was alone in the sun outside the caddy house when I learned, when I heard their voices. I was unraveling the core of a golf ball and thinking about Frohman and wishing that my father too were alive to help me face fear and sadness and a world full of harder boys who were not a prey to their stockings, whose stockings had not become a conscious obsession of fear, a measure of courage or cowardice, a challenge or an admission. But mostly I was just miserable and unraveling rubber when I heard their voices, rich, guttural, quarrelsome, with the sourceless flow and uncontrol of bubbling mush. When I heard the first voice say, "Shure. Cahy that bag and sign your dead warran'! That boy a fool to cahy that bag, man, shure."

And the second voice: "Better be him dan me. 'Cause de Cap'm jest natchally figure to win dis turment one-up. Jes like it was writ down in de book, 'cause ain't de Cap'm dooze three-up and two to play in de first turment?"

"And de tanker got ole Snag. Wham!"

"And ain't de Cap'm dooze two-up and one to play in de second turment?"

"And de split bullet found ole Frohman. Wham!"

And then a third and a fourth voice together with the other two in soft, outrageous babbling, in ceaseless turmoil and harangue with the noise that irritable chickens make, the total, the absolute, the utter conviction of sound, "Ole hawd-haided boy. Shure, man, de Cap'm gwi be lookin' down Mister Ginny thoat on number eighteen green and then where is you at?"

"An' didn' ole Frohman has that dream about passin' wid de dices three times, and didn' de dream book say mind out where you walks and git down on de number three?"

"Cap'm gi'ing ole Frohman a fawty-dollar sen'-over. Boy, how come you don't gawn home and save de Cap'm money?" And then Cap'm John's voice calling, and the swift silence within the caddy house.

"Hopper? Where's my boy? Come on here, son, and bring my bag."

He came out slowly, with the red bellhop's cap on his saint-like head, downlooking, miserable, as if he were sick, stopping once to kick something with his long thin foot. Then he said quietly, "Yas, suh, Cap'm. Here I'm is." Inside the caddy house the dark eyes with the pale china irises watched him go, like the eyes of animals in a cave.

And so there was a gallery of Negroes too—a forlorn, downcast, stringy lot, following at a safe distance, not talking.

I don't remember much about that game. We must have made a strange procession forging along with the deliberation of priests and acolytes, with Hopper Bell looking like a walking advertisement for a Georgia Springs hotel, and the trailing Negroes and big Cap'm John and Mr. Guernsey and the other Negro.

I remember chasing along behind, running often and bumping into them as if I were blind, and being spoken to, and then I remember Hopper Bell's thin, agonized, up-gazing face beneath the red monkey cap watching the flight of the ball with rushing eyes, and then I was praying that Cap'm John would lose and it was the next to the last hole and then I thought that I would have to scream for them to stop and with my mouth already shaped for words and my eyes on the crucifixion of Hopper Bell's face and then Mr. Guernsey had teed his ball and was waggling his club and I couldn't scream.

The rest isn't easy to tell, being a composite within an instant of all the terror, the recrimination, the shame that seems to have been childhood: the instant when Cap'm John struck the ball with all the heave of a spike driver; the click that could have been the snapping of a camera within my mind; the slow instant of exaltation, of despair, when Hopper Bell squeezed his eyes beneath his long pale fingers and the eyes of the other Negroes rose and held and sank even as they began to walk away, spent, and when Mr. Guernsey turned to shake hands with Cap'm John (Mr. Guernsey had one ball out of bounds) and Cap'm John turned and Hopper Bell still held his eyes in his Christlike hand.

"What's the matter with my boy?" Cap'm John said. It was late, nearly dark. There were only the five of us at the tee. "What's the matter with my boy? What's the matter with you, son? Won't somebody tell me what's the matter with my darky?"

And then Hopper's voice, sudden, thin, gentle: "Nawsuh, Cap'm, suh. Ain't nothin'. Wham, Cap'm Jawn, suh. Wham, Cap'm!" on an ascending wire of sound.

He thought that I was congratulating him, at first. At first he just thought that I had gone out of control, or maybe he thought that I was trying to fly. It was just that I had to say it then and so maybe I did run headlong into him, leap into him. He caught me rather handily. I remember his embarrassment and the touch of foolish mirth as if some ladies' lingerie had blown into his face and then I was telling him and choking and we were sitting on the green mound and the others had walked away, leaving us alone in the mist that had begun to rise with evening. He listened—quiet, kind, massive.

"Fear, you know," he said. "It is a very real thing. . . . Only the truly young in the world have the wisdom to be afraid. Someday you will understand this, that most people on earth are born old and heedless and unafraid." (This was in 1914.) "I am glad you told me," he said finally. "I care less for the game of golf than I do for my caddy's face. Come along, now, and we'll straighten him out."

Frohman's funeral was on the following day, and my uncle, Cap'm John Bell, gave him that.

It was fine. Frohman would have been mighty proud to see himself riding in the polished black wagon behind the Negro with the cotton gloves and the opera hat. And to have seen the Negroes. There must have been a hundred of them who came, appeared, as if out of nowhere, with the definite pomp of people invited to a party, and dressed for the occasion. And then the band! Cap'm John gave him that, too.

So things were a little better that day. Frohman lived out near the New Basin Canal and the railroad tracks, and just the right distance from the sad little picket field of wood and concrete markers that was to be his stopping-off place until some later city ordinance should shunt his dark dust elsewhere in the great anonymity. So we walked; we were a parade. Things were better.

First there was the square black wagon with the screened windows and the carved circus scrollwork, then the six-piece band, then Cap'm

John and I, and then the Negroes. I remember looking back as we turned the corner with the band taking the high notes of "Tiger Rag," their dazzling clarinets and trombones aimed at the sky, shimmering, and I could see all the curled palms swinging in unison with a cakewalk swagger, and the ten or fifteen Negroes in bandmasters' uniforms (a kind of outlandish Negro improvisation from the outlandish Caucasian habits of Shriners, Elks, Masons, and the Royal Order of St. James, only made of cheap materials; they were an organization) with the black velvet banner and the white cotton gloves. I remember the identical curl of each pair of the white cotton gloves . . . and the way they lifted their feet: high and slithering as if missing imaginary eggs. It was fine. We must have been grand as we rounded the turn skirting the New Basin Canal on Frohman's march to glory. Even Cap'm John swaggered a little.

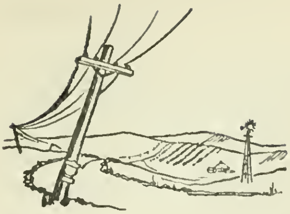
"This is better," he said. "I should have my prince suit here. It is remarkable what Providence directs their feet while they aim those horns at heaven. Frohman must be enjoying this," and we sashayed around the turn onto the dry mud street to glory. . . .

And so we buried Frohman. Cap'm John was splendid.

And that afternoon too we had our first ride on the new *Martha R. Bell.* She is still in service, small and tough and jovial, with a decided swagger of her own on the turns. Somehow I know that she will live just about as long as Cap'm John, and not much longer. I see her now and then. And when we marched out of Frohman's funeral that day, and onto her steep, new deck, he seemed to have stepped out of public life and back into the privacy of himself. The only regret I have ever heard him express concerning his brief sojourn among the gentle was over the winning of his third golf tournament.

Hopper Bell, by the way, is dead.

"Experience, you know. That is the thing. Experience is pain and it is out of pain that we grow." I remember he said that, that evening on the way back, hurrying around the great bend in the river, butting our way proudly in the amber afterglow. The gulls were clamoring and moiling over a drifting meal. And then I remember him standing against the evening, looming a little bit in the wheelhouse beside me, silent, watching the river. I remember him that way. When I left him that night I thanked him.



Backwoods Humor

Clyde W. Wilkinson

PERHAPS, Dear Reader, you would like to join the Sit, Whittle, and Spit Club, official organization for all adult males who know and practice these three rules:

1. *Don't sit in the sun.*
2. *Don't whittle toward yourself.*
3. *Don't spit against the wind.*

Far from the madding crowd and off the beaten track there is a place where the tall pines grow; where sparkling, fast-running streams flow; where life is good because a man does not keep eternally in a sweat about things; where life is as informal as a sneeze; where things are so quiet you can hear the spiders spin; where pork is home-cured, lard is home-rendered and soap is homemade; where camp meetings are held regularly under brush arbors, even if the people are as superstitious as gamblers or sailors; where "funmakings" abound in the form of play parties, barn dances, 'possum trots, house-raisings, barbecues, shooting matches, quilting parties, logrollings, husking bees, singing bees, and fox hunts; where the only musical instruments are the fiddle (not the violin), the guitar, and the banjo; where the rarest of all modern luxuries—idle time without chronic unemployment—allows the lanky, gawky men and boys, whose belts seem to need tightening, to congregate around campfires and on crossroads store porches, to attempt to drown their sorrows that have already learned to swim, and to enjoy their own homespun humor. Where a man with a two-mouse-power brain not made for climbing the tree of knowledge starts, after strumming his catarrh vigorously, on a story as long as a rainy Sunday in the country; where one story is lit on the stub of another and the train of thought has no terminal but continues with the persistence of a toothache; where the people are pilgrims on the path of least resistance, as full of tricks as a thirteen-spade bridge hand, but as friendly as wet pups; where mosquitoes use your ankles for filling stations—there is where you will find a gentle, genial, slow brand of humor; for that is the backwoods.

And as for humor, there is much about it that most people do not know. The semasiology of the word *humor* would itself be a joke to the backwoodsman. *Humor,* basically, means what Ben Jonson used it to mean—a kind of mysterious juice or something that works within man to determine or change his temperament. Or, as Woodworth or Freud would put it, a hormone that affects man psychologically. Only in medical terminology is it so used today.

But, by a process not infrequent in semasiology, the word *humor* came to mean the resultant temperament, which might be either temporary or permanent, instead of the causal juice. Thus we have *in a good humor* and *in a bad humor.*

Then, by another quite usual occurrence in semasiology, the word *humor,* when unqualified by such words as *good* and *bad,* came to mean only one kind of humor—the laughing or funny humor.

And finally, reversing the initial change in meaning, anything that might cause humor became known as humor. That is the usual meaning now.

Still it is necessary to differentiate between *humor* and *wit;* for, while many people use them interchangeably, there is a difference. *Humor* is the more comprehensive term, frequently involving a feeling of sympathy for the butt, Bergson notwithstanding and Thurber upholding. Wit is more purely intellectual, being the "*felicitous* perception or expression of the incongruous," as Max Eastman put it. Repartee, satire, and sarcasm are wit, not humor. One may well be humorous without being witty, but wit brings about humor. Were this an article on backwoods wit, it would be very short; for backwoodsmen usually are not especially witty. But since it is on backwoods humor, the problem of selecting and limiting is a major one; for the backwoodsman is very humorous.

Roberta Semple agrees when she says, "Then I like their ever-ready sense of humor, that laughs as often at their own hardships as at things actually funny."

Here are some examples of what she meant: When asked how much interest the Landlord Jones charged, Will Prender of Gee's Bend, Alabama, said, "Better ask somebody else that. I can write my name, but be dog if I can figger interest. Buy on the credit and it costs about 10% more, in the first place. Then there's 8% charged up on the credit. Some says that makes 18%. Others say, considering we don't have the credit but part of the year, that it adds up nearer 36%. And some landlords figger with a corkscrew dipped in ink."

"What if he cheats you?" someone asked.

"How you going to prove it? Landlords keep the figgers and croppers ain't scholars. If you think he's cheating you, you can cuss him out—where he can't hear you. Or you can move on if he and the sheriff don't pistol-whip you back to work off the debt."

Then when asked about living conditions under the landlord, Will explained: "Sleeping in the house there is about as much shelter as sleeping behind a barbwire fence. And croppers don't get no credit for improving buildings. My cousin Evrit claims he was hammering inside his house and the hammer flew clean through the rotten wall and kilt a pullet in the yard."

One phase of life the backwoodsman often makes fun of is the general and particular laziness of people. It is told that a certain man over in Happy Hollow vicinity was so lazy the neighbors decided to take him to the cemetery under the pretense of burying him alive. He peacefully submitted to being put in a coffin and hauled away toward the graveyard. At the edge of town a neighbor noticed the procession and inquired who was dead. "Nobody," replied the driver, "but we are going to bury Tom Jones because he is too lazy to work and support his wife and five kids who are on starvation."

"Why, you don't say so," said the kindhearted neighbor; "I will give him a bushel of corn if you will let him off this time."

Tom Jones lifted himself up in the coffin, rubbed his eyes and asked, "Is it shelled?"

"No," replied his neighbor.

"Drive on, boys," said Jones, shifting his face into neutral; and he indolently lay back in the coffin.

Another: Old Jim Moss, over on Polk Mountain, got so lazy one hot summer he wouldn't keep his wife's axe sharp so she could cut her own cook wood. Jim's old hound dog was lazy, too. The two would lie around in the shade and gripe and growl while Jim's wife, Fanny, would make things hum. One day the dog was howling mighty loud and pitiful. A stranger, passing by the house, inquired of Fanny why the dog was doing all the yelping. "He's sitting on a cocklebur," said Fanny.

"Why don't he move?" queried the stranger.

"He's just like Jim," said Fanny. "He'd rather howl as ter move."

Later on when the depression hit the country and Fanny's hens went on a strike and Jim's credit at the crossroads store dropped like a parachute, Jim pepped up a little. Things got to looking serious when starvation began to stare him in the face, and one day down at the store he told some of the boys that "be darned if he wouldn't might' nigh break his back carrying in washings for Fanny before he would starve."

These stories of Tom Jones and Jim Moss are a little extravagant but are fine illustrations of the cussed laziness common in almost every community. The lazy fellow who nailed the Lord's Prayer on the wall at the foot of his bed and who, after falling into bed, was accustomed to say, "Lord, them's my sentiments," is a true example of thousands who are hale and hearty in appetite, sound and "snorous" in sleep, active and energetic in frolic, yet who shun downright, honest work as they would shun smallpox.

Even the nomenclature of backwoods Arkansas reveals humorous aptness. Some very expressive place names are: Swampoodle, Goose Hill, Nubbin Ridge, Buttermilk Hill, Frog Level, Devil's Hole, Clabber Creek, Hog Thief Valley, Spoonerville, Dog Branch, Bug City, Food Suck, Pea Ridge, and Potato Hill.

Even the newspapers and magazines abound in backwoods humor. Here are some gleanings from them:

> The big revival meeting at the brush arbor tabernacle was a success. We had one conversion, three weddings and seven fights. We were left with more roosters in our flock than last year.
>
> The members of the men's Sit, Whittle & Spit Club, Inc., are making an investigation to determine who poisoned the fish in Soakum Creek last week by washing their feet in its waters.
>
> Dinkus Limpleg hops worse than ever now since he fell thru the kitchen floor at a dance the other night and the family's old sandy sow bit his good leg.
>
> At a recent meeting of the Sit, Whittle and Spit Club, Inc., of which Slosh Waterhead is the grand dragon, a resolution of reproof was offered and passed against I. M. Boozy, storekeeper at Soakum

> Center, for putting fine sand in the last batch of paint with which he painted his store, and furniture, such as nail kegs, soap boxes, etc. Slosh alleged he had ruined his best knife and pair of pants as a result of the foul deed.
>
> Old Man Tellem Bigger plead guilty to clearing out the thicket of timber between the swimming pool and highway, but said he did so to allow the swimmers to see the folks on the highway, and vice versa, and also encourage the wearing of bathing suits.
>
> Three boys appeared at the club and alleged complaints against the Misses O. U. Deere, Imajune Beetle, and Early Mae Bugg for putting quinine in their face powder and paregoric in their lipstick. The girls claimed their mother placed the ingredients there as a safeguard and were dismissed without charges after Mr. Slosh sampled their lips to make sure they were harmless.

Humor is so natural with the backwoodsman that it even gets into the advertisements of his magazines. Here is an advertisement that was run in four successive issues of the *Ozark Magazine.*

> We Hillbillies down here in the Ozarks are supposed to be so perpetually happy and well satisfied that we will sit for a half day on a cocklebur without either howling or moving. I am happy, but I'm not satisfied. I want another thousand subscribers to my Ozark Magazine, and I also want a second class mailing permit, so as to save postage. Now the government won't allow me to give my subscriptions away but they don't object to me offering you a four months' trial subscription for one thin dime on a money back guarantee of satisfaction.
>
> So I suggest that you send a dime in coin or stamps for a four months' trial subscription to this news-magazine of the Ozarks with the understanding that if at the end of the period you are not satisfied with your purchase your dime will be promptly refunded. If, on the other hand, you are satisfied, like hundreds of others, and are convinced that this wonderful publication is as unique as a hillbilly, tasty as a watermelon in June, invigorating as an April breeze, and as eagerly anticipated as a monthly Santa Claus, then send me another 40c for a full year of 12 more issues, or 90c for a full three years' subscription.
>
> You can't lose. Our cards are on the table face up and you hold the trump. Flip me the dime now and you will not only help a

> young editor towards success, but you will be helping yourself to some of the most interesting reading you have had since the days of the "Arkansas Traveler" and Opie Read's "Slow Train Through Arkansas, etc."

Yes, the backwoodsman is humorous in two senses: He is an anomaly or *sport* (in the biologist's meaning) and therefore humorous, and he is a true humorist, after his own fashion.

We have our philosophers of humor; we have our professional humorists; we have our literary humorists; we have our wits (and nitwits); and we have our people, "creatures of the woods and wilds, not in wall towns" (in George Meredith's words), who, in their daily lives, make and enjoy their own homespun humor, which oozes from them like toothpaste from a tube—the backwoodsmen, for example (who are only one of the many groups, however). The philosophers—such men as Max Eastman, Henri Bergson, T. L. Masson, William Hazlitt, George Meredith, Joseph Wood Krutch, and Stephen Leacock—unanimously tell us that incongruity is the source of all humor. The absurd, the irreconcilable, the inappropriate, the misfit, the miscreant, the *sport,* the *greenhorn,* the *tenderfoot* or the *furriner*—these are funny because they do not "jibe" with the usual conception; they are incongruities. But the philosophers are not backwoodsmen.

The professional humorists—such men as Will Rogers, Eddie Cantor, George Burns, Jimmy Durante—learn formulas for jokes, then substitute a, b, and c (facts or ideas) for x, y, and z (unknowns) in the formulas, and presto! we have a "new" joke. But the backwoodsmen are not professional humorists, either.

The literary humorists—such as Mark Twain, James Whitcomb Riley, Edgar Wilson (Bill) Nye and Artemus Ward—put flesh and blood on the skeleton of an old joke, or contrive a new one. But neither are the literary men backwoodsmen.

The wits (perhaps more properly called nitwits)—and here Ben Bernie reigns supreme—say and do things that are neither fish nor flesh nor good red herring, but some people consider them humorists. They are humorous, as any "sport" is humorous, if the desire to laugh at (not with) them is not quenched by disgust. But the wit is just the opposite of the backwoodsman's; it is that of the ultra-sophisticate.

As for the backwoodsman, not even a cigar is more subject to being made a butt than is he. And many jokes there are about the backwoods. But again that is not the topic; for the topic here is the backwoodsman as a maker of humor.

He does not study the philosophy of humor. In fact, he probably does not know what it is; and if you were to mention a philosophy of humor he would probably ask you how much a philosophy of humor is, or say that he did not know that it was measured by philosophies-full. He does not, as the professionals, designedly make humor; he asks no other remuneration than a good laugh; he follows no formula. He does not, as the literary man, labor to bring forth a mountain of fun, to preserve his humor that future generations may read and say, "What a funny fellow he was!" So when he begets a mouse, nothing is lost. His humor is as spontaneous and natural as the dislike of paying taxes, and all he asks is that his companions recognize that he is intelligent enough to see the funny side of a situation. A little mouse of a thought scampers across his brain and he pursues it.

Even though his humor almost invariably comes in small talk, like that of the wit or nitwit, it is not fraught with repartee, puns, quips, and turns; for these are on the intellectual level of wit, and the backwoodsman is a humorist, not a wit; and he is never silly. He never loses the thread of his story looking for pearls of speech to string on it, even though he may qualify his statements as thoroughly as a writer whose text is eternally heckled by footnotes.

In general, the run of store-porch humor is a gentle humor: an outgrowth of extensive leisure, corn-meal mush, sun and rain, dew and moonlight, and backwoods stillness. It rarely bears bitterness; the backwoodsman laughs because he sees no reason why he should not. It is casual and follows no plan or philosophy of humor.

Because the backwoodsman uses no philosophy of humor, follows no formula, and has no design or purpose except to create mirth, his humor almost defies classification. Typical of attempts at classifications of American humor are those of Sculley Bradley and Stephen Leacock. Bradley considers our native humor as dependent upon (1) homeliness, (2) situation, (3) exaggeration, (4) the punctured illusion, while Leacock believes that American humor is produced by, or is a result of (1) deep simplicity, whether real, affected or alleged, (2) situation —getting away from the conventional, (3) exaggeration, (4) disillusion —seeing things objectively. The two classifications are as much alike as the methods of a Mexican and a Texan counting cattle: They amount to the same. Yet both are faulty classifications; for classifications should be complete, mutually exclusive, and founded on one basis with an underlying purpose. The first class here includes all the rest. Indeed, it is the basis of all humor. But, for convenience, this literary division can be used, leaving out division (4)—the humor of punctured illusions—for the backwoodsman does not resort to that device.

Basically no different from other people, the backwoodsman enjoys making a butt of what newspapermen call a *cub,* college students call a *fish,* cowboys call a *greenhorn,* Boy Scouts call a *tenderfoot,* pedants call a *novice* or *neophyte,* and backwoodsmen call a *furriner.* It seems to be human nature for people in any walk of life to think of the uninitiated, because of his *simplicity* or *homeliness* in new fields, as a ready subject for a joke—without regard for how much more he may know about everything else except their little circle of known things. He is incongruous; he doesn't fit their preconceived notions; he is therefore humorous. And the backwoodsman, like a young schoolteacher, delights in showing any new knowledge he may have gained, and particularly in making or telling a joke on one who is not "in the know." A sample of this kind of humor is a recitation dealing with a lad from Gulch Hollow, who, on first coming to Eureka, was lured by the tempting yellowness of the store-window lemons. Having never seen lemons before, he bought a whole dime's worth. His first attempt to bite one revealed his mistake, but being in the midst of onlookers, he did not hesitate until he had eaten all of his lemons. No one laughed—outwardly—even after the youth explained, "Yessir, fer a considerable spell I've been honin' to get my fill of these here tropical fruits because I shorely do pleasure in the flavor of 'em and now I aim to revel in it."

In the same vein—that is, of laughing at naïveté—is the story of the old maid who prayed protractedly for a husband. Finally, one day when she was praying out in the woods, an owl hooted, "Who! who!" And the old maid joyously said, "Anybody, Lord. Any man will do!" But of course when a neighbor who heard her told this on her, she vowed that she knew of his approach and wanted to amuse him.

This nonchalance and attempt to pass the incident off as an intentional joke is typical. One night at a moonlight supper up at Indian Creek schoolhouse, Uncle Bob Wilkins carelessly poured buttermilk instead of cream in his coffee. An observing farmwife started to get him another cup, but he would none of it. He stirred his coffee well and explained that he always took buttermilk in his coffee at home, and that he much preferred it to cream.

While there is no end of joking and pranking among the backwoodsmen themselves, the "furriner" is choice game. A new hand in a West Texas thresher crew stands as good chance in the almost nightly kangaroo court as a "furriner" does of passing a week in Blue Eye, Arkansas, without being made a butt. Just take the incidents of last summer when that "furriner" came up to the crossroads where Ike Donahue keeps the store. The jokes the natives "pulled" on him within the first week, to say nothing of the many little quips and drolleries that turn a fellow into jello, were exemplary.

The "furriner's" name was Weldon McCreary, a young fellow as impressionable as new carbon paper. One day out on a fishing trip Weldon found a turkey nest where the turkeys had just hatched, leaving eggshells scattered around. He was so greatly interested in it that he asked a thousand inane questions which the hillbillies answered as best they could, despite their amusement. Finally one hillbilly got tired of "so dam' many questions," and felt justified in lying a little. (He explained later that "You jest naturally want to lie like hell when you see the flappin' ear of a feller who's goin' to lie about what you tell him; so I jest thought to give him some material. He wouldn't believe the truth; so why not try stretchin' it a little for him?") But he straightened it all out for Weldon after the others refused to cooperate, explaining that the kid was a "likely" fellow, only trying to learn.

With this as preliminary, the hillbillies had an excellent chance to reap the rewards of their truthfulness. It set the stage for the second act and lent credulity to some incredible stories that ensued when Weldon found a pile of condensed milk cans near an old campsite. When Weldon relates his adventures in the wilds of Arkansas, he always tells about discovering the cow's nest.

Well, nothing succeeds like success, and Weldon's believing about the cow's nest with the credulity of a thirty-five-year-old maid when a man tells her he loves her called for more as strongly as does the beginner's luck of a gambler or the first drink of a preacher's son.

The next day, no more than Weldon's remark about the length of a pumpkin vine was necessary to start another series of incredible stories that would do a Texas cowboy justice. The variations and ramifications of the accumulative pumpkin story that followed were so numerous and extensive that several hours went into their telling. But the essence of the story was that pumpkin raising would be as prosperous a business as gold mining in the Klondike except for the great expense of skates, necessarily put under the young pumpkins to keep the fast-growing vines from wearing them out dragging them on the ground. And to support the story, Donahue had Weldon write out an order for an astronomical number of skates.

Usually if there is anything to be gained by so doing, the backwoodsman can laugh all over and enjoy a joke immensely without showing it outwardly. Thus he can enjoy it a week or more, or until a better one comes along. And so it was with the two jokes just recited. But a third threw all into contortions, for it involved not only belief but action of the "furriner" on that belief.

Weldon had hired out to work for a hillbilly, Rube Wilkins. On being told to grease the wagon, Weldon asked a neighbor how. He was told to take the wheels off, remove the tires, grease all around on the inside, replace the tires, then replace the wheels. When Weldon seemed a little skeptical, the neighbor explained that there was a groove for grease under the tire that would be readily seen when the tire was removed. From this groove the grease ran down through the small holes in the spokes and into the hubs, in just the right amounts. This all sounded good; and it was only by the opportune return of Rube that he saved a tire-shrinking job; for the hired man was hard at it, following directions.

Weldon was a "likely" fellow, though, if a little credulous; and he could read. And here's what that came to, according to Rube Wilkins:

> You know, over at Blue Eye where we come from, that there's the reel brush. Weldon McCreary he's about the only feller down that there creek bend as knows how to read and write; so about seven or eight of us chipped in and taken the Springfield newspaper, figgerin' we could let Weldon read it to us.
>
> Well, we done hit, and one day we was settin' around listenin' and Weldon was readin' about where the paper said as how ever'body ought to plant a lot of corn and plow hit a lot because some mighty bad drauts [droughts] was comin'. Mart Miller set and puzzled awhile and then he says:
>
> "Weldon, what's a draut?" a-thinkin' Weldon didn't know from the way he read.

> Weldon, he chawed his terbaccer a minute and strokes his whiskers what's a-gettin' purty long and says:
>
> "Well, I couldn't be jest shore, but if I ain't mighty mistaken, a draut is one of them new-fangled varmints that's a cross betwixt a coon and a wildcat. Anyhow they shore is hell on corn."

The backwoodsmen, though naïve themselves, delight in this humor of deep simplicity and homeliness. They make much of it, as is shown by the multiplicity of tales of the same water, some of which are: "The Old Settler: His Reasons for Thinking There Is Natural Gas in Deep Rock Gulley," the humor of which lies in the naïve reasoning and, no little, in the language; "Peace," humorous because of the simple reactions of Jud and Martha on seeing their first train; "Their Christmas Good Deed," humorous because of the peculiar naïveté that allows two boys to steal in order to do their good deed of giving a Christmas present; the story of the sheriff who admitted: "Oh, yes, yes! I seed him all right—passed him and spoke howdy to him. But I didn't know the low hound reprobate was out of jail;" the story of another sheriff who arrested an outlaw but turned him loose on the spot because the criminal swore that he was innocent; and the story of the backwoodsman who, on going to see about a neighbor bachelor who had not been seen for several days, called at the window, "Ball Steel, Ball Steel, air ye dead? If ye air, whistle."

It is not to be expected that all of backwoods humor has its origin in deep simplicity; an equal amount of it comes from the humor of situations which get away from the conventional or cause someone to lose caste. In the philosophy of humor back of it, there is no difference between a man's falling heels over head out of a boat and the reply of the young man when told that a tiger was after his mother-in-law: "What do I care what happens to a tiger?" There is the same strange reversal.

Another type of humor based on situation is the pat juxtaposition of seemingly irreconcilable things; for the baser seems always to have weight to drag the higher down, making humorous its loss of caste. The little boy who cried to go to the wedding and stammered, "Mamma, I never have seen a wedding nor a wildcat either," inadvertently made humor by this method. "Courting in Kentucky" is humorous because Mary Ann, the schoolteacher, stoops to conquer in saying "I be" in order to answer Jake's ungrammatical question, "Be ye goin' ter marry me?" about which she had previously chided him. "The Battle of Pedlo Crick" depends on the following situation for its humor:

> Then she ups and mixes it with him. They slap, scratch, kick and cuss till it looks like somebody's goin' to get hurt fer sartin. Then they call time out to git their breath; Eddie gits to promulgatin' the propershishin; so when he makes at her with another swipe frum thet clapboard, she sed right serious like, "Now, Tubby, let's quit this. Sumbody might cum along and think we wuz fightin'."

A story with a similar turn has Jude Wilson weaken and not kill a man because Jude's brother Buzz explains repeatedly, ". . . revenuers is men, Jude, same as me and you. Ye ain't supposed t' kill men. They's a law agin it. Besides, don't Maw's Bible say somethin' 'bout God not likin' it if ye kill a man?" Then at the end Jude asks, "What else do Maw's Bible say, Buzz?"

Many times the humor of lost caste is a little irreverent or discourteous. Take, for instance, this quotation: "High on the top of the Boston Range I met an old man of seventy-two, and I talked with him about his cattle and his crops. They weren't doing so well, he admitted without bitterness. 'The government is fixin' to buy up my land; reckon they must be aimin' to raise hoot owls on hit,' he chuckled."

Another hillbilly announced that Roosevelt was the greatest man that ever lived. "Greater'n Jesus Christ," he said solemnly. "Christ said, 'Follow me and ye shall not want.' Roosevelt says, 'Set down, boys, and I'll bring hit to ye.' "

Still another story that teems with bad manners is that of Sam Thweat's visit. One time Sam stayed for dinner with Mark Bailey and the biscuits hadn't risen well. Sam had no misgivings about saying, "Humph, looks like they squatted to rise and baked on the squat," even though it crushed Mrs. Bailey.

A whole group of somewhat irreverent jokes and stories center around the camp meeting. The story of the cripple who, when called on to testify what the Lord had done for him, said, "He darn near ruint me," gives no end of pleasure. The story of the harelip who got religion only to lose it the next night when people asked him too many times to repeat his testimonial, and that of Uncle Hod who got religion but lost it on the way home when his buggy broke down are also examples.

The backwoodsman is not averse to the use of malapropisms and other wordplays, though he is not adept at it. He can tell with alacrity about old Mrs. Pettigrew's complaint of "pains in her abominable muscles," or that "with one of them new Fords her son Wid can climb any manner of mountain in neutral."

Nor is he above a pun. Old Mark Bailey from Red Star tells of his family, thus: "Yes, suh, they come three boys, then a girl, then another boy. So I named 'em Matthew, Mark, Luke, Ann, John."

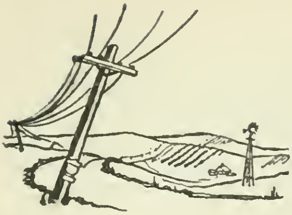
All the backwoods practical jokes, of which the backwoodsman is very fond, depend upon situation. These jokes bear no malice; they simply take advantage of a situation that lends itself to funmaking. The store clerk who risked his job, and lost it, to put a cocklebur under the saddle of the well-to-do, correct, obese customer had nothing against the old man; he only wanted to see him lose caste for the fun of it.

The story of exaggeration, in the backwoodsman's version, has to do with hunting, weather, dogs and dog fighting, fishing—things near him. But he does not make nearly so much of this type of humor as does the cowboy. When he uses the tall tale, it is usually to make a butt of a gullible "furriner" or is the result of competition as to who is the best fisherman or who has the best dog:

> 'Twas in the early fall an' pappy an' me hed been a-eatin' nothin' but fish all through the hot spell, then they stopped a-bitin' an' fer days an' days we hed no meat vittles at all. The ducks was a-beginnin' to flap towards the south an' Pappy being a dead shot with "Jenny," that's the old muzzle loader, 'lowed as we mite contrive to get ourselves a nice fresh duck. So we loads up old Jenny with powder and balls an' sets out. 'Bout ten rod from our doorstep we sees a big mallard duck come a-flappin' along 'bout ten feet high. When he sees us he riz' up, but didn't change his direction none. Pappy waits till he has passed over an' then he ups and lets him have it right where he sets down; if he'd been a-settin' which he ain't.
>
> When the black powder smoke clears so we can see a little, there ain't nary sign of that duck, 'ceptin' the innards which is

a-danglin' graceful like from the limb of a big sycamore. Pappy 'lows he musta blowed him to bits; so we gives up a-huntin' fer the other parts. All the rest of the mornin' me and Pappy tramped the woods but nary wigglin' fowel or varmint did we see. Pappy's shootin' musta scairt 'em away. By this time we was plumb tired an' empty, so we come back to the cabin a-figgerin' we'd hafta be content with mush.

But when we opened the door the pleasentist smell come to our noses. Pappy looked at me an' I looked at him, but we both knowed it weren't neither of us. Then our eyes lit on the fireplace an' a-hanging on the big hook over the fire, was a duck, roasted to a nice gold brown. We figured the way it all happened was like this: Pappy's shot hit the mallard a-cleanin' him out from stern to stem an' knockin' him up in the air, where he fell down the chimney a-catchin' by one foot on the hook. He hung there a-turnin' an' turnin' while the feathers singed off. Then with the outsides off an' the insides out he jest natcherally couldn't do nothin' 'cept roast. Which same he did to a turn.



Reverdy

Jessamyn West

I NEVER see asters without remembering her—never the haze of their pink and lavender blossoming as summer dies, but her name is in my heart: Reverdy, Reverdy.

I never say her name—not to anyone. When people ask about her, as they do occasionally even now, I say "she" and "her." "She is still gone." "We do not hear from her." "Yes, she was very beautiful," I say. But not her name.

Not Reverdy. That is buried deep, deep in my heart. Where the blood is warmest and thickest. . . . Where it has a sound to me like bells, or water running, or the doves whose voices in the evening wind are like smoke among the madroñas and eucalypti.

I have longed all these years to tell her how it was the night she left. You may scarcely believe it, but it is worse to have a good thing that is not true believed about you, than a bad. To be thanked for an act you meant as harmful: Every year those words sharpen until at last they cut like knives.

You musn't think she was like me. She wasn't in the least. Not inside nor out. She had dark hair like a cloud. Yes, really. It wasn't curly but it didn't hang straight. It billowed out. And her face—oh, you mustn't think it was anything like mine. She had hazel eyes and a pointed chin. And you've seen lots of people, haven't you, with very live, animated faces and dead eyes? It was just the other way with Reverdy. Her face was always quiet, but her eyes were so alive they glowed. Oh, she was the most beautiful, most alive, and most loving girl in the world, and she was my sister.

I cannot bear for people to say we were alike; she was really good, and I was just a show-off.

Mother—she was better later, and gentler, but then she was bad, cruel, and suspicious with Reverdy. Everybody loved Reverdy. Not just the boys. But Mother wouldn't see that. She always acted as if Reverdy were boy-crazy, as if Reverdy tried to entice the boys to her. But it wasn't true. Reverdy never lifted a finger to a boy, though they were about her all the time from the day she was ten. Bringing her May baskets, or Valentines, or their ponies to ride.

And the big, tough boys liked her, too. When she was twelve and thirteen, big eighteen-year-olds would come over and sit on the steps and smoke and talk to Reverdy. They never said anything out of the way. I know because most of the time I was with them. Reverdy didn't care. She never wanted to be alone with them. Reverdy would listen to them until she got tired; then she'd say, "Good-bye for now." She'd always say, "Good-bye for now,"—and then she'd go out and play, maybe run, sheep, run, with the little kids my age. And the little kids would all shout when Reverdy came out to play with them, and if the game had been about to die, it would come to life again. If some of the kids had gone home they'd yell "Hey, Johnnie," or "Hey, Mary," or whoever it was, "Reverdy's going to play," and then everyone would come back, and in a minute or two the game would be better than ever.

I used to be awfully proud of being her sister. I don't know what I would have done without her. I was a terribly plain little frump: I wore glasses and had freckles, and if I hadn't been Reverdy's sister I'd have had to sit and play jacks by myself until Joe came along. But boys would try to get Reverdy's attention by doing things for me. They'd say to her, "Does your sister want to ride on my handle bars?" And Reverdy would say, all glowing, happier than if she'd been asked, "Do you, Sister?" Of course I did, and then when the boy came back *she'd* ride with him just to thank him.

I don't know why people—why the boys liked her so. Of course, she was beautiful, but I think it was more that she was so much—well, whatever she was at the moment, she never pretended. She talked with people when she wanted to, and when she got tired of them, she didn't stay on pretending, but said, "Good-bye for now," and left.

But Mother would never believe she wasn't boy-crazy and I would hear her talking to Reverdy about girls who got in trouble, and how she'd rather see a daughter of hers in her grave. I didn't know what she was talking about, but it would make my face burn and scalp tingle just to hear her. She wouldn't talk sorrowfully or lovingly to Reverdy, but with hate. It wasn't Reverdy she hated, but you couldn't tell that, looking at her. She would bend over Reverdy and shake her finger and there would be long ugly lines from her nose to her mouth, and her eyebrows would be drawn down until you could see the bony ridges they were supposed to cover, all bare and hard. It used to make me tremble to see her. Then Reverdy would get mad. I don't think she knew half the time what Mother was talking about either—only that Mother was full of hate and suspicion. She'd wait until Mother had finished; then she'd go to the foothills for a walk—even if it was dark—and stay for a long time. And then Mother would think she was out with some boy again.

I remember one time my mother came to me and said, "Clare, I want you to tiptoe out to the arbor and see what's going on there. Reverdy's out there with Sam Foss and I haven't heard a sound out of them for an hour or more."

The arbor was a kind of little bower covered with honeysuckle. There was only a tiny little door, and the honeysuckle strands hung so thick over it the arbor was a kind of dark, sweet-smelling cave. Reverdy and I used to play house there. I knew I ought to say I wouldn't go spying on Reverdy, but I wanted to please Mother; so I went creeping out toward the arbor, holding my breath, walking on my toes. I didn't know then—but I've found out since—you can't do a thing without becoming that thing. When I started out to look for Reverdy I was her little sister, loving her. But creeping that way, holding my breath, spying, I became a spy. My hands got heavy and hot and my mouth dry, and I wanted to see her doing—whatever it was—Mother was fearful of.

And then when I got to the arbor and peeped in, I saw that Chummie, our ten-year-old brother, was there with them, and they were all practicing sign language. Deaf-and-dumb language was the rage with kids that summer, and there was that big Sam Foss sitting cross-legged, practicing sign language so hard he was sweating. They had oranges rolled until they were soft, and straws stuck in them to suck the juice out.

That's all they were doing. Practicing deaf-and-dumb language, and sucking oranges that way, playing they were bottles of pop. I guess they'd taken a vow not to talk, because nobody said a word. Even when Reverdy saw me peeping in she didn't say anything, but just spelled out, "Hello, Sister." But my hands felt so hot and swollen I couldn't spell a thing, and I just stood there and stared until I heard

Mother call me to her, where she was standing strained and waiting on the back steps.

"They're playing sign-language with Chummie," I told her.

"Is Chummie with them?" she asked and her face relaxed and had a sort of shamed look on it, I thought.

I went in the house and put on the old dress I went swimming in, and floated around in the irrigation canal until supper was over and so I wouldn't have to sit and look across the table at Reverdy.

Things like that were always happening. I loved Reverdy more than anybody, and I hated Mother sometimes for spying and suspecting and lecturing. But I wanted people to love me. And especially you want your mother to love you—isn't that true? And no one loved me—the way Reverdy was loved. I wasn't beautiful and spontaneous; I had to work hard and do good deeds to be loved. I couldn't be free the way Reverdy was. I was always thinking of the effect I was making. I couldn't say, "Good-bye for now," and let people go to hell if they didn't like me. I was afraid they'd never come back . . . and I'd be left . . . alone. But Reverdy didn't care. She liked being alone, and that's the reason people loved her, I guess.

One evening in October, when it was almost dark, I was coming home from the library, coasting across lots in the hot dry Santa Ana that had been blowing all day. Cool weather had already come, and then three days of this hot wind. Dust everywhere. Under your eyelids, between your fingers, in your mouth. When we went to school in the morning the first thing we'd do would be to write our names in the dust on our desks. I had on a skirt full of pleats that evening, and I pulled the pleats out wide so the skirt made a sort of sail and the wind almost pushed me along. I watched the tumbleweeds blowing, and listened to the wind in the clump of eucalypti by the barn, and felt miserable and gritty. Then I saw Reverdy walking up and down the driveway by the house and I felt suddenly glad. Reverdy loved the wind, even Santa Anas, and she was always out walking or running when the wind blew, if she didn't have any work to do. She liked to carry a scarf in her hand and hold it up in the wind so she could feel it tug and snap. When I saw Reverdy I forgot how dusty and hot the wind was and remembered only how alive it was and how Reverdy loved it. I ran toward her, but she didn't wave or say a word, and when she reached the end of the driveway she turned her back on me and started walking toward the barn.

Before I had a chance to say a word to her, Mother came to the door and called to me to come in and not talk to Reverdy. As soon as I heard her voice before I could see her face, I knew there was some trouble—some trouble with Reverdy—and I knew what kind of trouble, too. I went in the house and shut the door. The sound of Reverdy's footsteps on the pepper leaves in the driveway outside stopped and Mother put her head out of the window and said, "You're to keep walking, Reverdy, and not stop. Understand? I want to hear footsteps and I want them to be brisk." Then she closed the window, though it was hard to do against the wind.

I stood with my face to the window and looked out into the dusty, windy dark where I could just see Reverdy in her white dress walking up and down, never stopping, her head bent, not paying any attention to the wind she loved. It made me feel sick to see her walking up and down there in the dusty dark like a homeless dog, while we were snug inside.

But Mother came over to the window and took the curtain out of my hand and put it back over the glass. Then she put her arm around my shoulders and pressed me close to her and said, "Mother's own dear girl who has never given her a moment's trouble."

That wasn't true. Mother had plenty of fault to find with me usually, but it was sweet to have her speak lovingly to me, to be cherished and appreciated. Maybe you can't understand that, maybe your family was always loving, maybe you were always dear little daughter, or maybe, a big golden wonder-boy. But not me and not my mother. So try to understand how it was with me, then, and how happy it made me to have Mother put her arms about me. Yes, I thought, I'm Mother's comfort. And I forgot I couldn't make a boy look at me if I wanted to and blamed Reverdy for not being able to steer clear of them the way I did. She just hasn't any consideration for any of us, I decided. Oh, I battened on Reverdy's downfall all right.

Then Father and Chummie came in and Mother took Father away to the kitchen and talked to him there in a fast, breathless voice. I couldn't hear what she was saying, but I knew what she was talking about, of course. Chummie and I sat there in the dark. He whirled first one way and then another on the piano stool.

"What's Reverdy doing walking up and down outside there?" he asked.

"She's done something bad again," I told him.

Mother's voice got higher and higher, and Chummie said he'd have to go feed his rabbits, and I was left alone in the dark listening to her, and to Reverdy's footsteps on the pepper leaves. I decided to light the lights, but when I did—we had acetylene lights—the blue-white glare was so terrible I couldn't stand it. Not to sit alone in all that light and look at the dusty room and listen to the dry sound of the wind in the palms outside, and see Reverdy's books on the library table where she'd put them when she got home from school, with a big bunch of wilted asters laid across them. Reverdy always kept her room filled with flowers, and if she couldn't get flowers she'd have leaves or grasses.

No, I couldn't stand that; so I turned out the lights and sat in the dark and listened to Reverdy's steps, not fast or light now, but heavy and slow. . . . And I sat there and thought I was Mother's comforter, not causing her trouble like Reverdy.

Pretty soon I heard Mother and Father go outside, and then their voices beneath the window. Father was good, and he was for reason, but with Mother he lost his reason. He was just like me, I guess. He wanted Mother to love him, and because he did he would go out and say to Reverdy the things Mother wanted him to say.

Chummie came back from feeding his rabbits and sat with me in the dark room. Then I got the idea of a way to show Mother how much I was her comfort and mainstay, her darling younger daughter, dutiful and harmonious as hell. Mother wanted me and Chummie to be musical; she'd given up with Reverdy, but Chummie and I had taken lessons for years. Usually we kicked and howled at having to play; so, I thought, if we play now it will show Mother how thoughtful and reliable we are. It will cheer her up while she's out there in the wind talking to that bad Reverdy. Yes, she will think, I have one fine, dependable daughter, anyway.

So I said to Chummie, "Let's play something for Mother." So he got out his violin, and we played that piece I've ever afterwards hated. Over and over again, just as sweet as we could make it. Oh, I felt smug as hell as I played. I sat there on the piano stool with feet just so, and my hands just so, and played carefully, every note saying, "Mother's comfort. Mother's comfort. Played by her good, fine, reliable daughter."

We could hear Mother's high voice outside the window and Reverdy's low murmur now and then. Chummie finally got tired of playing—the music wasn't saying anything to him—and went out to the kitchen to get something to eat. I went too, but the minute I took a bite I knew I wasn't hungry, and Chummie and I went to bed. I lay in bed a long time waiting to hear Mother and Reverdy come in, but there wasn't any sound but the wind.

I was asleep when Reverdy did come in. She sat down on the side of my bed, and it was just her sitting there that finally awakened me. Then, when I was awake she picked up my hand and began to press my finger tips one by one, and spoke in the sweetest, kindest voice. You'd never have thought to hear her that she had just spent four or five hours the way she did.

She said, "I'll never forget your playing for me, Sister. Never. Never. It was kind and beautiful of you. Just when I thought I was all alone I heard you telling me not to be sad." Then she leaned over and kissed me and said, "Good night, now. I've put some asters in water for you. They're a little wilted but I think they'll be all right by morning. Go to sleep, now. I'll never forget, Clare."

If I could only have told her—if I could only have told her then. If I could have said to her, "I was playing for Mother, Reverdy. I guess I was jealous of your always having the limelight. I wanted to be first for once." If I could only have said, "I love you more than anything, Reverdy, but I have a mean soul," she would have put her cheek to mine and said, "Oh, Clare, what a thing to say."

But I couldn't do it and next morning she was gone. And there on the table by my bed were the asters she had left for me, grown fresh over night.

RANCHERS

Maurice Lesemann

They went off on the buckboard in the rain,
The children in the straw. I didn't know
Which one of the long roads they'd have to go,
But I saw them just as plain.

For anywhere they chose to turn the horses
There'd be the same grey miles of tableland,
The same rank smell of sage, the same wet sand
In the windy watercourses.

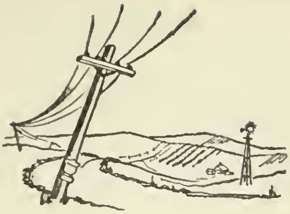
And anywhere in time there'd be red hills
Rising, raw rock against the rain. I saw
The plunge and splash across a lonely draw,
The long slow climb with red mud on the thills.

And somewhere, in good time, I knew they'd pass
As if in secret from the road they traveled,
To follow out like a thread of rope unraveled
Some faint mark in the grass,

And come to a gate, perhaps where a stray steer
Breathed in the dusk, or slipped on the wet stone there;
And come to a house . . . I knew they'd be alone there
Most of the year.

The earth would slowly change where they had stepped,
The air would fill up softly with the sound
Of teams, voices . . . I thought the red hills must have slept
Until they woke the ground.

I thought no words could make, on anybody's mouth,
As true an image as their hills would keep of them,
Where on our world spread westward like a cloth
They worked a homely hem.



Indians in Blue Jeans

Alice Marriott

THERE is only one set of statistics that I, a nonmathematically-minded being, can keep straight in my head. They relate to the Indian population of the state of Oklahoma. At the drop of a hat I can inform you that Oklahoma has one-fourth of the Indian population of the United States, almost one hundred thirty thousand individuals, and that they come from fifty-five distinct and recognizable tribes. Having shot that bolt, I am in the habit of waiting smugly for the hearer to digest the information.

Because I grew up in Oklahoma, went to elementary school, high school, and college with Indians, took them for granted as ordinary members of the community, it required some time for me to realize that there was anything very special, or even different, about them. Light dawned; there were books and courses in anthropology; I learned about the isolation existing in all-Indian communities; I came to the realization that under the surface in Oklahoma was a whole life going on that nobody knew anything about. There followed absorption in that life to the exclusion of all-white Oklahoma; there came the feeling that it was the only kind of life to be lived.

The rudest of awakenings came, however, when I was hired by the Department of the Interior to work with the Indians. The Department meant well, and by and large did better than good by me. But because I knew what a white person could of the under-the-surface life in Oklahoma; because I knew personally the leading members of several tribes; because in the Indian country I came and went as I pleased with the consent of those who lived there, the Department of the Interior thought it would be nice to let me take visiting "firemen" around the state of Oklahoma.

This is neither the time nor the place to discuss personalities. The visitors were usually perfectly swell people, and it was the best of good luck for me to meet them, let alone be with them in the isolation of movement day after day. And I had a perfectly swell time in a lot of ways.

But there was the traditional fly in the customary ointment. Many of the visitors had lived in *the* Southwest—that is, in New Mexico or Arizona. Many more had traveled there. Practically all of them were making a side-swing through Oklahoma on their way back to Washington. All of this colored their mental approach to Oklahoma Indians.

In the first place, it does an Oklahoman no good at all to listen to talk of a "Southwest" that excludes Oklahoma. Parts of Oklahoma are pretty thoroughly Southwestern, even to the extent of having cowboy boots made in Fort Worth instead of Boston. But then we wear cowboy boots when working. If they were vacation clothing, we might pick them up in the nearest shoe store, too. We are not professional Southwesterners; we just happen to live in the country.

In the second place, Oklahoma is a big place. To see anything of it, you cannot sandwich your travels between a week in Santa Fe and a train-change in Kansas City. As a matter of cold, hard fact, driving an average of fifty miles an hour—in the days when you could average fifty miles an hour—it takes the better part of a day and a night to drive across Oklahoma. That is, if you go directly and don't stop to see anything but essential traffic lights. It's forty miles between towns on an average, and you can manage, in parts of Oklahoma, to do a fair lot of driving without striking any signs of towns or white people. Those are the places where you have to go to find Indians, and if you are the kind that requires a good hotel bed for a night's sleep, you can make up your mind to do some night driving getting to it.

In the third place, there were those—those—those unmentionable Navajos. Every blessed one of the visiting "firemen" arrived foaming at the mouth with adjectives in praise of the Navajo. To the fairest sights that the Oklahoma Indian country had to offer, they turned a blind eye; to its most exciting sounds, a deaf ear.

"Have you ever seen a Navajo Yeibichai?" they would inquire. "You don't know what Indian dancing and singing are like, then. Such color! Such movement! Such emotion!" And they would hum a Yeibichai song in a way that even I, who had never heard one, would know was wrong.

I began to get pretty much fed up with the Navajos, which wasn't fair to them. It became a challenge, a crusade. I would—since somebody had to—show these ignorant foreigners what Indians really were like. There were one-fourth of the Indians of the United States in Oklahoma—more than in any other state. Numerically, on the lowest basis, they far outnumbered the Navajos. Mentally, a great many of them considered the Navajo one step up from mules, but considerably below the IQ's of intelligent horses. I went off in corners with books, and came up with knowledge out of their own minds to confound those visitors who chanted the praises of the Navajo. Nothing, I proved to them conclusively, that the Navajo did or said or had was Navajo. Navajo life represented traits that they shared with all other Athabascans or had taken over lock, stock, and barrel from other Indians or from the whites. And still the visiting firemen told me that I hadn't lived till I'd known the Navajos, and I became desperate. I would, I determined, write a book to prove something or other. It didn't matter what, so long as what it proved was about the Indians of Oklahoma.

So that's how it all got started. I don't pretend that the proportion of full-bloods is as high among all Oklahoma Indians of all tribes as it is among the Navajos. I don't claim that their cultures have been as little affected by whites or as much shaped by their own wills. I don't pretend that the average, everyday blue jeans or cotton dresses of the rural Oklahoma Indian will compare favorably for picturesqueness with the velveteens and satins and jewelry of the back-country Navajo out to do a spot of sheep-herding.

What I claim is this: that Indians, since De Soto upset the apple cart in 1541, have been making the best of things and doing pretty well at it. Those that I have known best—those from the fifty-five tribes and remnants of tribes in Oklahoma—have all certain qualities in common. They are proud of being Indians. They may twist their heads on one side, look up at you out of the corners of their eyes, and say, "What's a poor Indian going to do?" when they want you to write a letter to the Commissioner of Indian Affairs for them, but just you try calling them poor Indians!

They are skeptical, friendly, generous, and hospitable. The stranger within their gates is going to be tested and tried—weighed in a balance—and if he is found wanting, he will never get within the gates again. For the lucky few whom they admit, there is the acquisition of whole new family circles, and all the fun and affection—and responsibility—

that go with any family circle. Once in, you know you will never be hungry—never again be without a roof where you are welcome to lay your head. Notice that word *welcome.* That's the force of the whole thing.

Theirs may be, on the surface, the life of the white farmer. There *are* Indian Okies. But once inside, once aware of what is going on, you find yourself with a set of challenges; the life around you dares you to analyze it—to sift those elements that are purely Indian and of one tribe from those that are white or have been borrowed from other Indians. A lifetime is too little for the sorting.

Now, if you want your Indians in the show window and within reach of the best hotels, bars, and dress shops, go to your capitalized Southwest forthwith. You can see a powerful lot of Indian life—just as much as the Indians want to let you see—with powerful little effort. But if your concern is with Indians who are Indians, and minding their own business about it, then come to Oklahoma—but take your time when you get here. Forget about making connections in Kansas City, and for Heaven's sake forget that you ever heard of the City of the Holy Faith. No Oklahoman, white or Indian, will thank you for bringing that subject up.

In the back country in Oklahoma, you will probably see things that strike you as funny, but remember—the incongruities that amuse the whites come from the culture that the whites whammed over Indian heads for four hundred-odd years. Don't think that you don't amuse well-informed Indians in exactly the same way that they amuse you. Honestly, now, why do you think they put war bonnets on the heads of Senators? Not altogether to do them honor, you may be sure.

Not Darkness, But in Shadow

Fred Shaw

WHEN I shook the dust of the flatwoods from my feet, I thought I would never return, but I do. At night I go back. I am waiting for sleep in the darkness, ten years and a thousand miles from my youth, when the same tightness gathers at my throat.

I lie again in the musty room of the Blue Goose Hotel, smelling the warm grease from the kitchen, hearing the night sounds of the street: footfalls on the steps outside, a car rattling and banging across the railroad tracks, Negroes laughing and talking and singing as their shoes clomp on the pavement below. A hound is baying in the distance. I turn on my belly and look out at the night and at Milltown, at the stores and the dark pines beyond.

This is a story about Milltown. It is a story of the flatwoods soul—ribald, coarse, wallowing in life, yet praying to a God of superstition and hell-fire, of mercy and predestination. If the tale means anything to you, you will see Milltown squatting in the dust, rising of a sudden to a great belly laugh, to quixotic action, or to almost incredible violence.

For anything could happen in Milltown. I was in the drugstore the night they gave Lem Davis croton oil when he was begging for whisky. I saw the black hole in the dead man's head on election day. And when the moonshiners dynamited their still and killed the deputies who found it, I heard the boom that shook the town.

Once I almost witnessed a murder in Joe Bassett's store, a dusty, dead place where nothing could have happened. I had wandered in to buy some shotgun shells late one afternoon, but when I saw old man Bassett talking to the Baptist preacher's wife, I didn't bother him. He was quiet enough ordinarily, but his temper could flare up like a woods fire. There was the day a month before when his brother Josh started cursing in the store and Joe bashed his head with an axe handle.

I could still see Joe Bassett dragging his brother through the dust and tobacco juice of the street to Doctor Mac's office, could hear him say, "Well, I reckon I killed him, Mac. See what you'n do for him."

Old man Bassett and the preacher's wife were standing back there in the shadows, pawing over bolts of cloth he had laid out on the counter, sniggering and talking fast. Joe Bassett's little eyes sparkled; smiles spread across the brown parchment of his face, and with every one you could see the unnatural pink above his false teeth.

The preacher's wife looked feverish and hungry. She moved nervously about the counter, rubbing her fingers over the cloth, holding it up to the light, or brushing it gently against her cheek. She was too tired to be pretty, but she was younger than old man Bassett. He kept edging close to her, so that his leg touched her thigh, and when he reached across the counter for another bolt of cloth, his hand fluttered over her naked arm. They hadn't seen me, I suppose.

After a while I tired of looking at them and started thumbing through a seed catalogue. Once Joe Bassett's voice rose harsh and shrill in denial, "You'n wear anything you like. You're young." He laughed, clumsily gay.

"But we can't afford that."

Then their voices fell, and I couldn't hear anything.

I had yawned past the rhododendrons and was ready to investigate the possibilities of the scarlet sage when a shadow fell across the pages of the catalogue. When I looked up, Lucy Sutton stood there—a tall Negro woman, pretty in the way of the mulatto, soft and appealing. She was grinning uncertainly, vaguely, her chubby face creasing up from the corners of her mouth. She spoke, and her voice was husky, "Ah wants some lahd, boss man. Ah wants some lahd n' ham n' fatback."

"I don't work here. I read seed catalogues."

"Ah don' eat seed, boss man. Aincha got no blackeye peas?" For a moment she stared stupidly at me, licking her lips with the red tip of her tongue, shaking her head as if to clear her vision; then the soft brown eyes lighted up, and she smiled. "Yuh don' sell nuthin', boss man, no meal n' taters, no collahd greens. Yuh don' wuk heah, boss man."

She didn't stagger much between the door and the grocery counter, but she was drunk all right. You could tell by the cautious, mincing way that she walked, feeling her way with her feet, leaning toward the counter before she got there. When she touched it, she grinned back at me, "Ain't nuthin' tuh it, boss man, jes' ain't nuthin'." Then she leaned against the counter and waited there.

It couldn't have been long that I watched her, but it seemed a long time too, with the shadows lengthening and the voices droning from the back of the store. After a while she got tired and started moving restlessly about the counter. She began to slap the sugar can, softly at first.

Joe Bassett looked up, annoyance plain on his face, but he didn't pay much attention to the Negro, not at first. He just looked toward the noise. But as the slaps on the sugar can grew louder, he began to glance nervously away from the preacher's wife. Lucy was banging hell out of the can, and suddenly she began to chant in singsong: "Yassuh, Ah wants collahds, yassuh, Ah wants snapbeans, yassuh. . . ."

. Old man Bassett shuffled to the middle of the store and stood watching the Negro. I could see red anger moving up his throat till his face burned with it, and his voice was tight as a bowstring. "What you want, Nigger?"

"What Ah want? Ah wants uh piecer meat. Ah wants som' goddamn meat n' uh pounder lahd."

Old man Bassett didn't say anything, but he edged in toward her like a cat creeping up.

She was smiling, and then she wasn't. She was watching Joe Bassett coming, staring wide-eyed as if she couldn't see anything else. Her mouth opened and shut, but no sound came. Then suddenly her body was released into violent action as she twisted and threw herself toward the door, running clumsily till she tripped and fell.

When she sat up, she didn't look frightened any more. "Yuh knock me down. Ah run n' yuh hit me. But yuh gon' wish yuh hadn', ole man, goddamn yo stinkin' soul tuh hell."

As she was pushing up from the floor, Joe Bassett's foot lashed out and caught her full in the mouth. She staggered backward, falling, smashing against a counter. I saw it happen, and I knew the temper of the old man, but the whole thing seemed incredible.

Lucy half rose, holding her hand to her mouth till blood oozed through her fingers and dropped to the floor. "Ah ain' gon' fuhget dis, ole man. Ah'm gon' tell 'bout you'n dat woman. Nuthin' lak dat fools Lucy. Ah'm gon' fix yuh."

"You bitch. You black bitch." Before the shrill scream died in his throat, Joe Bassett was running, stumbling back to a barrel in the shadows, trembling and gasping as he snatched out an axe handle. He had headed back toward the Negro when the preacher's wife caught him by the shoulders.

"Don't kill her, Joe. Don't . . . don't . . . don't. Oh, God, oh, God." She hung on his arms while he twisted and squirmed, trying to shake her off. And when he finally broke loose from her, the Negro woman was gone.

There was no understanding Milltown. Dozing in the sun, she looked warm and soft and fat. Awakened, she might come purring and rubbing about your legs, blinking cheerfully at you while the dust she had stirred settled back to earth. But, again, she might slash out and leave a long red gash on your arm. You could look at the blood dropping from the wound and reflect on her waywardness, but it didn't do any good then. It was too late.

Milltown troubled and fascinated me. I could sit in Doctor Mac's office on a Saturday night and know how business was going at the Diddy Wah Diddy, a roadhouse on the edge of town, and at the Silver Dollar, the saloon around the corner. Boys still wet behind the ears joked with Big Doc while he tied up gaping slashes in their scalps—"hemstitching the heroes," he called it.

I had to know about Milltown, and so I walked the streets. I sat on the bench under the water oak, listening to her men talk, hearing weird stories of things that went on behind the doors of the town. At night I drifted about, watching shadows moving on the shades of lighted windows, stopping for a moment to chat with men hunched over a drugstore table, with farmers gathered at a street corner, watching schoolboys play pool under an inverted cone of light. Through the stores went Milltown's people, white and black.

One night Lucy followed me out of Levy's store; and when we were in front of Doctor Warren's house, where the oaks spread thick shadows on the ground, she touched my arm.

"Ah ain' talkin' 'bout 'em, boss man." She nodded toward Joe Bassett's store. "Dat woman wuz good tuh me." She made a soft clucking sound with her lips. "But ole man Bassett, now. Ah ain' fuhgettin' him, boss man. Ah'm gon' fix him sho'." Soft and gentle was her laughter, but I didn't want to be old man Bassett.

After a while I got to feel that I could read the moods of Milltown. I would be sitting in the drugstore at night reading the newspapers and listening to the nickelodeon, idly watching occasional stragglers come in to drink Coca-Cola at the fountain, when I would see something on a man's face, violence, or passion, or fear—I never quite knew, Sometimes I would sit there waiting for the thing to happen while a tightness started low in my belly and moved up till it was like a cord on my throat. Or I would go up to the dingy hotel room and lie flat on the bed, listening to guns shooting and dogs barking off in the night and wondering what they meant.

I had to know about Milltown, and so I followed the talk of the town, from the lazy bench under the water oak to the drugstore prescription room. Wherever men talked, I would go. That's the way I started going to the City Barber Shop. There were two regular barbers and one who came in on Saturday, but two of them didn't count; it was the owner of the place, Jake Pegram, "Cousin Jake" they called him, who packed the boys in. When I first saw him, he was standing back of his chair, fat, bald, looking like an egg except that he was bigger in the middle and a little shinier on top. He was all grey except for his eyes, which were bluer than a jay bird's wing. I got a haircut, but it was the only thing I got—no gossip, no football talk. Cousin Jake was the world's most taciturn barber, I reckon.

"Shave?" he asked after he had cut my hair.

"No. But I tell you what, though. My hair's started falling out, and I wondered if you couldn't tell me what I could do for it."

Before answering me he rubbed his hand back and forth over his shiny head. "Well now, I dunno that I can. But when I was a boy and went to the barber shop, the barber'd cut my hair and then he'd say 'Tonic?' I'd always say no."

He didn't crack a smile, and after a minute he said dryly, "Tonic?"

"Unhunh. And lay it on thick."

Afterwards we were friends. It was as simple as that.

I used to go in there two or three times a week and listen to men talk. It was important to the life of the town, that barber shop was—a sort of town hall, athletic club, and literary guild in one. Almost everything that Milltown did or thought or felt got a hearing there. I can still see old Rob Bangs opening his mouth and shifting his quid of tobacco around and J. B. Patton, the newspaper editor, grinning so widely you could see the black stubs of his teeth. "It's like I say. If Gene Talmadge is elected governor, Georgia's going to hell."

And Cousin Jake looked owlishly over his glasses, "Well now, that farmer in town yesterday wouldn't have agreed with you."

"What 'd'ye say, Cousin?"

Jake's voice rose shrill and harsh, mimicking the nasal drawl of the backwoodsman. "Y God, there's one thing about ole Gene, y God. He got shet of ole Hoover. Har, har, har."

The men threw back their heads and laughed, slapping their hands on their thighs. They would sit around all evening waiting for one like that.

Cousin Jake had a reputation for wit and wisdom, but I'm not going to be able to make you see him as I did. So much depended on the way he said things—slowly and dryly—and the way he looked after he said them—solemn and owlish except for a faint flicker of a smile at the corner of his mouth. But his belly would be shaking with laughter.

After Benjy Few came in with the big catfish he caught in Puddin Creek, Cousin Jake said, "Don't say it, Benjy. Don't say a word, 'cause whoever caught that fish is a damn liar."

And when someone told him that Joe Bassett had threatened to kill Lucy if she ever again came in his store, Cousin Jake said, "I wish Joe'd stick to harmless sinning, like laying the preacher's wife." He was serious that time; his belly didn't quiver.

It was good to sit in that wooden shack, its soot-streaked walls blazing with Fitch and Lucky Tiger and Kreml posters showing fortunate youngsters who used tonic regularly and sad-eyed dodos who didn't; you sat there smelling the powder and those sharp, sweet liquids that barbers pour on defenseless heads, hearing the whirr of the clippers and the *snip, snip, snip* of scissors, and hearing too the talk and laughter that were as much a part of the place as the rotten, springy boards at the back of the shop. The door would fling open, and a man would come shivering out of the night, stamping the mud off his feet and wiping the fog from his glasses.

"Well, Doctor Mac, they do say ole Mary Jane Newton is took bad with her heart."

"No. No, she ain't. Mary Jane's the laziest and most hysterical woman in the flatwoods. But it ain't gon' kill 'er. No, I reckon it won't."

And the night the Baptist revival opened so hot that you could hear "Power in the Blood," "Shall We Gather at the River," and "The Old Rugged Cross" when the clippers weren't whirring, Rob Bangs spat a little off center and said that it was "high time. Ole Lem Davis's due to git sanctified about oncet a year."

Cousin Jake squinted over his glasses and said, "Well, I reckon we needn't worry till we'n hear 'Jesus Is Tenderly Calling.' They don't sing that; they moo it. And when they get so full of the spirit that the moo floats right under that door, we'n look for trouble. It's coming."

"Man Eater" Hall, the grave, timid shine-boy, came in for much good-humored ribbing, but he didn't seem to mind it. Occasionally he would show his teeth in a slow smile. More often, however, when he wasn't stoking the wood stove or making a shine rag play a tune on brogans, he was bent over problems on the checkerboard—practicing against the time when Cousin Jake would be free to play with him. The teasing went on.

"Eater, what ju' ole woman say when she left you?"

"Ah'll sue yuh later." That was one the men taught him; they liked to spring it when strangers were in the shop.

Something happened one of the first nights I visited the barber shop, but it didn't mean much to me then. Bud Walker stuck his red face in from the cold outside, smelling up the shop with whisky fumes before he was in the door. Cousin Jake paused in his work and looked at the shine-boy; Man Eater nodded and walked out the door. An hour later he was back, scratching at the alley door till someone let him in.

They had repeated that little pattern four or five times before I realized that Cousin Jake was trying to keep Man Eater clear of trouble.

By that time I had learned a good bit about Jake by piecing together scraps of information. Rob Bangs helped some. "Naw, we don't talk much about Niggers 'round the shop. Cousin Jake gets so het up it embarrasses him. He ain't no Nigger lover, mind you; he jest thinks they's human. It's a damfool notion, but if he likes it, we don't aim to pester him."

Jake helped too. I asked him once why he drank so much, and before answering he looked at me so long that I blushed. "You've been hearing people talk, boy. I don't drink like they say. Nobody does. But when I get plumb fed up with life, I drink till I don't think about it any more."

I had seen him when the life sickness was upon him, and I had heard him too—even before I came to know him. He would come lumbering, shuffling up by the hotel, singing always the same song—a slow, melancholy tune, singing loudly enough that I could hear him in my room over the street:

> The nits and the lice were walking the jice
> When one of them slipped and said Jesus Christ,
> It's so low, so damp, Bowling Green jail.

I would watch him waddling through the light at the crossing and into the shadows and the darkness.

It was a dark night when it happened, dark and warmer than it had been and windy too, so that I thought it would rain. That night the Baptist revival crowd sang "Jesus Is Tenderly Calling," and when they came to the chorus, "Calling today . . . calling today . . . Jesus is calling . . . is tenderly calling today," they mooed with such fervor that the words floated out through the darkness and came up under the door of the barber shop. I wasn't there, but I know they did. I know it.

It was the last night of what Milltown called "the protracted meeting," and I was alone in the Blue Goose. I had offered to stay in the lobby and register any transients who came room hunting so that the others could go down to hear the final exhortations of the preacher. When they returned, I didn't pay much attention to them. I hardly looked up from my reading as they mumbled their good nights and went on, the other inmates to their rooms upstairs, the hotel owner and her little boy to the parlor and family apartment that opened from the lobby.

Why I began to lose interest in my book, I don't know; but my restlessness probably had something to do with the sputtering old man who came in looking for Mrs. Moss. As I showed him to the parlor door, I knew vaguely that the old sputterfuss was her lawyer; I had seen him there before. But if for a moment his flushed cheeks interested me, there was only a fleeting curiosity; that was all. Then I turned back to my reading, dismissing the old man's obvious excitement from my mind and settling back in my chair. But it wasn't the same. Bony ridges that I hadn't felt before rubbed my back, the light on the book was dim, and my eyes kept straying from the page.

I tried going back and picking up paragraphs I had already read, but it didn't work.

I scanned the front page of the Atlanta paper, but finding the news as dull as my book, I walked out on the porch, lighted a cigarette and sat down, buttoning my jacket against the wind. I was conscious of the two inside. At first the voices from the parlor were a muffled stream of sound, annoying and meaningless, but after a while words began to disentangle themselves from the mass, and I could hear them.

Still the talk meant almost nothing till something caught my mind and I realized that what they were saying was of vital importance to me.

The man's voice, explosive, excited, was saying, "I'm telling you, Gussie, I'm telling you. They've got the Lord's purpose in their hearts, Joe Bassett and the rest. They're going to run every one of 'em out of town."

"Every one?"

"Every one. Every prostitute, every gambler, every drunkard. Joe and his crowd are just waiting for them to go to bed. Then they're gonna get 'em, Gussie, I'm telling you."

"It's good enough for them. This is a Christian town, and it's too good for sinners. Who all has to go?"

"I thought you'd want to know. There's Jake Pegram. . . ."

"Him?"

"Yeah, as the worst of the drunkards. He came in church tonight smelling like a brewery."

I didn't wait for any more. Tiptoeing from the porch, I ran in search of Jake Pegram, down the dim streets to the barber shop, to the drugstore, to the Silver Dollar. "He wuz here less'n a hour ago, but he ain't been back. But he wuz here, Gawd, yes. He'n the stock left together. He drunk it."

Back to the hotel I went more slowly, peering deep into the darkness, listening for a voice; but the quiet streets mocked me and the night pressed down. When I got to the hotel, I tried to decide what to do. And then I heard footsteps and a muffled song from the darkness: "The nits and the lice were walking the jice. . . ."

I was weak with relief, but I caught him by the arm as he came by, caught him and jerked him toward me so that he could see my face. "Try to listen, Jake, while I tell you something."

"Well, Joe. Hiya, ole boy. I got a new verse, Joe."

The jailer had a daughter that did what she oughter
With every ole jailbird that reached out and caughter,
It's so low, so damp, Bowling Green jail.

His voice was shaky and staticky because I kept jerking him by his coat lapels, pulling his face close up and saying over and over, "You gotta listen, Jake, goddamn it, you gotta listen." And when he quieted down, I said, "You gotta get out of town."

He looked at me, blinking owlishly in the half-darkness, and I knew he was sober enough to understand me if he would listen. "Well, Joe ole boy. Like to hear me sing it, Joe?"

I struck his face with my open hand and came in close to catch his arms. "You gotta get out of town. Listen, Jake, that mooing came in the door, like you said. The bigots have put on their war paint. They're gonna get you, every prostitute, every gambler, every drunkard."

"Say that last part again, Joe."

I said it again, going over the details slowly, patiently, telling him everything I knew; his face was fish-belly white when I finished, and his hand was a vice on my arm. "We're going to Nigger town, Joe. Come on."

Walking fast to keep up with him, I kept tugging at his arm. "No, no, no. That's just what you don't want to do. You gotta get out of town till they quiet down. And you don't understand."

"I understand, all right."

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Great gusts of wind beat down on us from the south; in the sky before us lightning was flickering through rifts in the clouds, glowing dimly, fading, brightening again . . . and then, *flash* and the sky blazed up till you could see grey-black clouds twisting and churning and tops of pines tossing in the light. Then it was dark again, and we plowed through the soft dirt, leaning into the wind, feeling the first raindrops on our faces.

Over and over I was saying to myself, "He's a goddamn fool. He's running straight to trouble, and he doesn't know what it's all about." We came to a hard stretch in the road, and we ran, stumbling blindly in the dark, till my eyes burned and I could taste cotton in my mouth. Then we slowed to a walk, while I kept thinking, "He's a fool. He's a goddamn blind fool." But I didn't say anything.

After a while Cousin Jake put his hand on my arm, and we stopped. When he talked, I could tell he wasn't drunk any more—not with whisky anyway, though his passion played over subjects new to our talk, black men, white men, and brotherhood. "You gotta see it, Joe. Bassett hates Lucy Sutton; they'll go there first and beat her door in and put tar and feathers on her. They'll call her a whore 'cause they like the sound of it and they don't know the difference. They'll beat hell out of a black woman just to hear her howl, but I'm gon' get there first."

"This is the South, Cousin, you're forgetting that. It's the South, and it's Milltown."

"Yeah, and it's Milltown's shame. You gotta see that, Joe. And if ever we come out of it, we'll come together, white man and Nigger."

A little farther and we came to black shanties huddled in the darkness at the edge of town, a clump of them at first and then two long rows facing a lane that twisted off into the woods. The silence was more than silence; the huts were still as their windows, where no lights, no shadows moved, and I knew that they knew. At the door of one of the houses we paused; Jake knocked and said, "Awright, Lucy," and the door opened soundlessly and we slipped in.

She stood tall in her faded kimono, smiling a little and nodding in the friendly way that Negroes have. In the firelight her bronze skin was soft and fresh, like a child's, but her eyes were sad. She motioned to the chairs beside the fire, and we went over and sat down. She sat down too and stirred the pine knots with a stick, sending sparks swirling up with the smoke. And after a minute she said quietly, "Ah'm glad yuh come, Mist' Jake. Ah'n take care yuh."

Out of the corner of my eye I could see Cousin Jake start forward, his eyebrows raised, but his question died in a rumble in his throat. He slumped ponderously back in the chair. It was as if she had waited for us.

We lighted cigarettes and waited, puffing clouds of smoke toward the fire. After a while Jake said, "You got a gun, Lucy?"

She shook her head. "Whut Ah want wid uh gun?"

"We're here to look after you, Lucy. We ain't gon' let you down." He pulled a knot from the wood pile and balanced it in his hand. "This might crack a couple of heads, if we work it right," he said.

"Ah knows whut Ah's doin', Mist' Jake. Yuh don' need dat." She chuckled deep in her throat; she grinned at me and winked, her face screwing up in silent laughter. "Yuh don' need nuthin', not nuthin' a-tall."

The minutes that we sat there dragged out, trailing off into the tapping of Jake's stick on the hearth, the dry crackling of the flames. Outside, a tree frog chirruped, chirruped and was silent; windows rattled and pines soughed and snapped when the wind rose, and the rain fell softly on the roof. The silence was a living thing that you could feel; the tenseness was in my belly, moving up into my throat, but I sat still and silent trying not to think—trying not to think, though specters pressed down on me. *The man is a fool, and the woman is a maniac. . . . I'll see their heads cracked together. . . . And he'll look like a fat black duck in the tar and feathers . . . but it won't be funny worth a damn. . . . I'll sit there liking him . . . and liking her too, feeling their shame. . . . And maybe they'll crack my head too.*

I looked at Lucy squatting across the hearth from us, smiling as she poked at the fire. Damn all crazy Niggers and barbers. Damn them to hell!

It was quiet, and then suddenly it wasn't. The men were there stomping about in the mud, shushing one another when a voice rose above a whisper; there must have been about a dozen of them. In the distance a dog barked, and then all was still.

Lucy motioned Cousin Jake to stay where he was, shrugged her shoulders when he tiptoed over to the door and raised the pine knot above his head.

Feet clomped on the steps outside, knuckles beat on the door, and a shrill voice, an old man's voice, said, "All right, Lucy."

Lucy walked over and pushed down on the bed, so that the springs twanged when she released them.

The voice insisted, "Open the door, Lucy. I'm comin' in."

"Don' come in, Daddy Joe. Ah done tole yuh to come tomorruh night. Go way now, Daddy Joe. Go way, honey."

Soft laughter rippled through the crowd. I would have liked to be out there in the rain, watching the men looking incredulously, then slyly at one another, winking, digging one another in the ribs. I could see them laughing unexpectedly, clamping their mouths shut, wanting to laugh again.

"You scarlet bitch, you know what I want. Open that door."

"Yassuh, Daddy Joe, Ah knows, awright. But Ah done tole yuh to come tomorruh night. Ah got company now, white man company."

Laughter exploded outside, roaring in the quiet. You could hear men slapping their thighs, coughing, gasping for breath, then going off again into rocking laughter. But above the confusion Joe Bassett was shouting, "Come on, you fools, let's bust the door in."

Then a countryman's nasal voice came from the crowd, "No, suh, we ain't hankerin' after no woman trouble. We're goin' to town. Come on, Pappy. Come on, Daddy Joe."

I lay down on the bed, buried my face in a pillow, and laughed till my belly hurt and tears came to my eyes. And after a long, long time Lucy made us some coffee, and we sat by the fire drinking it and grinning at one another.

STONE COUNTRY

Verne Bright

These are true things I saw of which I tell:

Three pilgrims were we on the road to hell
Eating the dust of dreams. Jake Silverthorne,
Bill Wolfskill and this child were taking morn
With the sting of wind on our mouth, a-setting traps
In likely river, drinking at running paps
Of mountains, eating the earth's sweet-tasting flesh.
I recollect 'twere April and the fresh
Grass were a-greening the hollows—day and night
Flew over us like geese in north'ard flight.
Jake Silverthorne, he said, "Mark, do'ee hear
Yan to the northern buttes, the beaver's there?
My stick floats thataway." We turned our mules
To the northland and the burnt hills. Dreaming fools!

This coon's set trap from Knife to Santa Fee,
From Coasts of Platte to the Californy sea,
Or I'm poor beaver. I recollect me now,
As a gangling boy fresh from the furrowing plow
I came into this country: Yellowstone
Were a cub of a crick, these mountains were half-grown
Sand hills, and the trees were sapling trees.
I've fought the blasted Blackfoot and the Rees,
And raised me plenty crop of Shian hair.
Rattlesnakes I've et; and a grizzly bear
I've rasseled afore now. I've seen the sky
Rain fire, I have, and this child wouldn't lie.
And I have seen stone country . . .

Mighty strange
It were: 'yond Timpanagos and the range
Of Stonies stretching south. The fur were thick
Where we were trapping up a dwindling crick

That flows from the Paiutahs. It were prime:
Seven dollars the plew if 'twere a dime!
We did our possible. Then hills went dry
As spring dwined into June, June to July;
Slow-moving devilbirds gloomed on the sky;
Leaves shriveled, and I mind me wind-whipt dust
Were like a snow: Our beards were white with frost
Of drifted sand.

We climbed a range and crossed
To a hard-bitten land. The Injuns there
Were small and scrawny with big eyes a-stare
Like owl-eyes in the dark. 'Twere none as knowed
That country in our band. There were no road
To tell us which way; and rank water stood
Black in the hollow rocks and thick as blood.
The grass were ghost-grass in that bitter land,
Greasewood and mesquite grew there and the sand
Were hell-fire on our feet. The nooning suns
Beat hammers on our brain. And bleaching bones
Burned on our eyes: The white skull-faces grinned.

Thinking of dead men dust on the desert wind
Slow we moved and silent. Our food were grass
And moccasin parfleche. This here coon'll pass
The ante if 'tain't starving doings, wagh!
Then Wolfskill shot a kiote in a draw
And we made meat and et. Come dawn we saw
Snow mountains edging sky. Our waterskins
Went empty, and our bellies ganted, thin's
A crane's leg; and our tongues cracked; and our lips
Dropped the slow ooze of blood as the red meat drips
Fat on the scorching coals. From there we went
The journey of a day: Our mules were spent
And so mule were our meat, mule-blood our drink,
And our bread were roots. . . . On wind-gnawed brink
Of death we marched: afore us many ridges
Of naked stone in the way. The crazy midges
Pranced on the sand . . .

Come morning-break we stood
On a clift of rock. Afore us were a wood,
Green, and the grass were green, and birds were singing
Fit to break their pretty throats and ringing
In our ears like heaven music. "Bill, hurraw!"
Yelps Silverthorne, "Here's April doings, wagh!"
And there were water shining in the sun;
And grouse a-squawkin'. I ups my rifle-gun.
"Here goes for meat!" says I, and cracks a bird
Plumb center. Dang my hindsights, take my word,
If'n his head went one way, slick as glass,
And his body t'other, and him still squawkin'. Grass
Were sharp as knives and cut the hosses' mouth.
"Here's wet wood and no flint and the wind are south!"
Says I. "Here's flint!" says old Wolfskill and takes
His hatchet to a tree; a shower of flakes
Flew like snow in February . . . Which
It were stone country or I'm a whelping bitch.
Everything were stone: The buffalo-berries
Were emeralds, dang my eyes! and the red chokecherries
Were rubies, bright as blood, and the sweet wild plums
Were garnet jewels bigger nor my thumbs,
And the crick were solid diamond, yes-siree!
Dabbled with morning light as ye ever see.

We filled our ruck-sacks and juned out of there
Richer nor Astor. Our hearts were big, I swear,
And singing squamptious. No more freezing, wagh!
Wading for beaver: We would trap a squaw,
A white one, down San Louiee way, and blow
Our jewels like a bourshway, we would so!
But hell! stone fruit and yarbs are mighty poor
Feeding for critters; we damn nigh starved afore
We hit game country. Our last cayuse went
For potluck. And them jewels all were spent
To buy another day of living; left
Them by the trail, we did, to ease the heft
Of packs on galling shoulders. . . .

Well, at last,
We shet that buzzard's pasture, and we passed
Into a country sweet as hills of home
The wild orchards heavy with autumn, the cool loam
Spicing our nose with its smell. The hungry days
Forgotten, we built a cabin in that place
And trapped. . . .
And laughed alive. . . .
Now, Sam, harkee,
Three pilgrims out of hell we were, that spree.

AFTER BRANDING CALVES

Conrad Pendleton

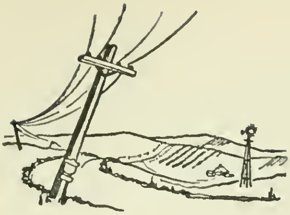
My brand now hanging from a post
Smells yet of smoking hair,
And there's a lasso rope, almost
In two, below it, and a few
Dim sparks still in the branding fire the thick day
Sinks into.

But I am through
With branding now till fall
Except with this I stare
Twice over at and cannot blink away:
My brand
Unblurs and blurs, its Bar-Z smoking-hot
In dusty heat and panting hide;
The cows outside
Mill back and forth along the rails and bawl—
Bawl frantic to their calves.

My hand
Still feels the circle of the handle-grip,
The squirm of every branded hip,
And I keep hearing from the branding lot
Or seem to hear
(The herd is pastured out of ear)
Bawling calves in dust and dung
'Twixt snubbing-post and saddle horn.

I'm branding-tired
As any hand I've hired
This season, though my reason's more than pay;
There were so many calves to brand and
Ear-crop without a pause or undertone
Of mercy.

Now
I'm tired—too tired to trouble how
We'll trail the herd to open land
To summer out in grass and sun—
Too over-tired to find
In branding, any fact full as the one
Of branding calves to mark them as my own—
Calves bellowing in heat and dust across my mind.



The Snake Without a Friend

Virginia Duncan

IF THERE IS a critter in this world without a friend, it is the rattlesnake. Prairie dogs bury rattlesnakes alive; dogs kill them; eagles, hawks, chaparral cocks, turkeys, chickens, hogs, and cannibalistic snakes eat them. Obeying an unwritten law of the range never to leave a rattlesnake alive, ranchers kill them to protect livestock. Many people collect them as a hobby or for canning, laboratory experiments, zoos, and reptile gardens, and for production of antivenins. It is amazing that the rattlesnake has survived at all.

When I was a child in West Texas, I saw a medium-sized rattlesnake disappearing into a prairie-dog hole. There wasn't a prairie dog anywhere to be seen. As the last rattle passed out of sight, prairie dogs bobbed up everywhere. In an instant dozens of chattering little animals, with their tails jerking, were scratching dirt into the hole. When the hole was filled, they tamped the soft earth down with their heads. The prairie dogs ganged up on that rattlesnake; by using their fast paws as shovels and their hard heads as bulldozers they interred their common enemy.

Years later Sonnie Noelke, West Texas ranchman, told me that while he was killing off the prairie dogs on his ranch he often found holes filled with fresh dirt. Digging out the holes he discovered that they had dead snakes in them. If just a little dirt is thrown in a hole on a rattlesnake, he comes out fighting mad, but if a lot of dirt is packed in on him he can't get out.

In their battles with rattlesnakes, chaparral cocks (commonly known as road runners) dart at the snake until it strikes, and then peck at the snake's eyes and head. Eagles and hawks feint several times until the snake uncoils and then seize it with their talons. They catch the snake behind the head with one talon and about the middle of the body with the other. If a bunch of turkeys find a rattlesnake, the hens usually stand to one side or go on about their business and the gobblers kill the snake. They peck at it and strike at it with their wings. Chickens often eat the baby rattlers. They attack them just as they would a worm.

The javelina or Mexican hog is fond of snakes. In sections where hogs are raised, few rattlesnakes are found. Many times I have seen a fat sow with a snake in her mouth, running and squealing in her attempt to eat the snake without sharing it with a dozen other pigs. Generally, hogs are immune to snake bite because their subcutaneous layer of fat retards absorption of venom.

Some dogs kill rattlesnakes wherever they find them. We had a fox terrier once that always trotted ahead of us in a trail and she found a snake if it was anywhere near our path. I never saw her fail to attack one. She killed dozens of rattlesnakes in her lifetime.

The coachwhip, indigo, and king snakes include rattlesnakes in their diet. I once saw a king snake swallowing a rattlesnake which looked larger in circumference than the king snake. I wondered by what law of dimensions the feat could be accomplished. But after thirty minutes there was a thoroughly stuffed king snake and no rattlesnake. . . .

Two girls, visiting at our ranch near Knickerbocker, Texas, went horseback riding with me. I took them by an old cemetery on the west side of our pasture. According to a local legend a mammoth diamondback lived in the rock fence around the cemetery, and I was orally stretching this legendary character beyond the bounds of the species when, suddenly, there it was! Talk about speaking of the Devil—he sure appeared in true form in this case. That rattlesnake looked like a big pile of salt and pepper with his black and ringed tail contrasting so sharply with the rest of him that it looked as if it was tacked onto the wrong snake. He was making such a racket with his rattling that our horses threatened to stampede. We were all nearly scared to death, but I wanted to prove to my daddy that I had killed "the big snake" I'd heard about for years; so I got the other girls to help me kill it. I don't blame them for being scared, because it was the first rattlesnake either of them had seen outside of a zoo, and I was scared because it was the biggest snake I had ever seen. We chunked rocks at it for an hour before one of us landed a direct hit and its humming rattling slowed to a weak, muffled crackling; the triangular head bowed reluctantly onto a flat rock, and I finished the job with my boot heel.

By the time we got through fighting the rattlesnake our horses were plenty skittish. They went temperamental on us and refused to carry the snake. We simply couldn't leave the evidence of the biggest snake story of our lives between two scrubby catclaw bushes on a rocky hillside. I knew that we could put it on my saddle if we had something to cover it with so the horses couldn't smell it or see it. I had a new suede jacket on my saddle, but I didn't want to put the snake in that. So one of the girls pulled off her stockings and we put them on the rattlesnake—one over his head and the other over his tail—rolled him in the jacket, and tied him on the saddle. At the ranch house we proudly displayed our big game. It was over six feet long with a ten-inch girth and weighed slightly over twelve pounds. There were fifteen rattles still attached, and there is no telling how many were knocked off.

The Mexicans skinned the diamondback for us and my sister made the skin into a belt. The three of us took turns wearing it to high school. Since it was four inches wide, we looked like we were saddled when we wore it, but what it lacked in glamour it made up for as a conversation-piece.

My brother, Charles, and I were engaged in a permanent feud based on his kidding me about my crooked rock-throwing. He looked at the big dead snake and said that he didn't believe we had killed it with rocks. I walked right into his trap and offered to show him the spot, forgetting that we had thrown a powerful lot of rocks at that snake. He took one look at the battleground and fell off his horse and rolled on the ground in a convulsion of laughter. "I knew it," he howled, "you didn't kill that snake. You just built a rock fence around him and it caved in on the poor thing!"

Rattlesnake skins are sometimes used for ornaments such as fancy belts, hatbands, billfolds, purses, boot inlays, and gauntlet tops. The diamondbacks' skins vary so much in background color that it is hard to find two alike. For days I had looked for a matching pair to make a hatband and belt to wear to the Midland rodeo. One hot summer day I was working sheep. A bunch cut back at the gate. To head them off, I took a short cut through an oak thicket where there was a lot of underbrush. My horse reared suddenly. Lying side by side in the narrow trail and almost under my horse were two diamondbacks.

They were about four feet long and had just shed. Their dark diamond patterns were almost black on a light salt-and-pepper-colored background. Immediately I visualized my belt and hatband. I bagged my hatband with a rock but my belt crawled into a hole near by. I killed and skinned the first victim and dug the other out of the hole with a grubbing hoe. I suppose at that rodeo I was the most diamond-bedecked woman who ever slapped leather on a cayuse.

Western diamondbacks have been found as high as 5,000 feet above sea level. The western diamondbacks usually hibernate during the cold months. They are very sensitive to cold, and it is the temperature rather than the season that determines the length of their hibernation. In the extreme southern part of Texas and in northern Mexico they have been seen crawling every month in the year.

Usually western diamondbacks den up during the winter in mountain caves, under overhanging rocks in ravines and canyons, and in ledgy hills. As they seek protection from the north winds they are found much more frequently in dens on the south side of hills. They go into hibernation about the time of the first frost in the fall and come out in search of food after the last frost in spring. I have found them under shocks of feed in the fields in late fall when they were caught out by an early cold spell, and they were so stiff from the cold they couldn't move. You could pick them up by the tail and the kinks wouldn't come out of their spines. They looked just like old crooked sticks. When I saw snakes in a shape like that, I always thought of the story Boyce House told me: "Two cowboys were sent out one winter to get some posts to fix up the fence. Trees were scarce but they found a lot of queer-looking crooked sticks which, on closer examination, proved to be frozen snakes—so the cowboys used them to string the wire on. The plan worked fine till spring came and the snakes thawed out and wiggled away, leaving three miles of fence that had to be fixed up again." . . .

When approached out in the open the rattlesnake almost invariably rattles, but if it is protected by a log or bush, it may lie perfectly quiet—depending on silence for protection. If the rattle does not halt the approach of its enemy, the rattlesnake raises the forepart of its body into an S-shaped spiral ready to strike. Any person or animal observing the snake in that threatening position is not likely to approach within striking distance. I have watched diamondbacks hold this pose for many minutes. If I made no move, the snake would finally stop rattling and retreat to the nearest covering, but it always kept its head held high with that threatening lateral-s curve in the forebody. Having noticed such behavior in the rattlesnake, I know that some tall tales are just extensions of the truth. Boyce House told me a story once about Sagebrush Sam who, I am inclined to think, was not stretching the blanket too much when he related this experience: "The other day I was asleep under a mesquite tree when I felt a pressure, and as I opened my eyes, there was a rattlesnake on my chest. He was coiled and if I made a move for my pistol or tried to jump up, he woulda struck me quick as lightnin'."

"What did you do?" someone asked.

"I saw there wasn't nothin' I could do; so I just went back to sleep."

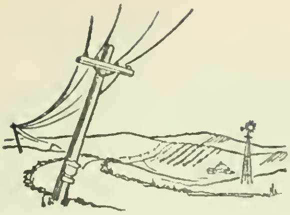
Many times I have annoyed a rattlesnake with a long stick until it would strike four or five times in succession, but I never saw one show any inclination to chase me. It can't strike over half its length. I used to watch Trixie, my little fox terrier, make rattlesnakes strike and she seemed to know just about how close she could get to them without being in danger. She was a fair snake-fighter. She would bark and dart toward the snake until it struck, then she would sidestep the blow. Finally the snake would be a split second slow in recoiling, and Trixie would grab it in her teeth back of its head and shake it into a dozen pieces. This was when Trixie could make the snake come out in the open to fight. Sometimes she would find one under a log or scrubby catclaw bush or a prickly pear and it wouldn't strike. Trixie would try all her shadow-boxing tricks first, then go under after it. In doing this she was frequently bitten. After rubbing her head in the dirt a few moments, with her stubby little tail tucked and her swelling head held low, she would run to the house. Mother would treat the wound. Trixie would go under the house, dig a hole in a cool place, put her head against the damp earth, and stay until the swelling went down. Then she came out thin and hungry and ready to hunt more rattlesnakes. She was bitten many times and each bite affected her less.

At times I have come upon a rattlesnake lying coiled in a shaded path and if I was walking slowly, it would first rattle softly, sounding exactly like the locust. It was apparently too lazy to move. If I stood quietly and watched it, several minutes would pass before it would rattle again. But when I hit it with a rock it would rear its head and rattle so furiously it sounded like a pressure cooker when the safety valve pops open.

The senses of sight and smell are well developed in rattlesnakes, but they do not hear in the ordinary sense of the word. Tests made by one herpetologist on a selected group of rattlesnakes proved that they paid no attention to loud noises made very near their heads but they did respond when a chair was scraped on the floor or a footstep caused vibrations through the floor.

The forked tongue which is continually flicked in and out is an aid to smelling and helps the snake determine the kind of ground it is crawling over. When it flicks its tongue out the two points touch the ground lightly. One herpetologist says: "This very sensitive tongue can pick up odor particles in the air and transfer them to the two tiny cavities in the front of the roof of the mouth. These pits are lined with sensory cells and are known as Jacobson's organ." The rattlesnake's vision is very keen, for I have seen one prepare to defend itself when I was fifteen yards away.

And it is small wonder that the rattlesnake is always instinctively on the defensive. He had better be! Hounded incessantly by enemies, attacked by man while he is attacking other enemies of man, the rattlesnake leads a disagreeable and uncertain life. And to cap it all, rattlesnakes don't even seem to like each other. In one case I know two rattlesnakes bit each other. The smaller one died three hours later. The larger one was all but dead six hours after the bite.



Earthy-Ann

Ruby Pickens Tartt

AT Tishabee, a small settlement on the Tombigbee River some half dozen miles from a railroad, I was directed to a dilapidated old house set back from the dirt road in a field so utterly worn out that nothing but dog fennel would grow there. The house was once occupied by Bob Hawkins, "Marse Bob" as the Negroes called him, and "Miss Ca'line." They had left it to their only son Charles Darwin Hawkins, one of the local intelligentsia, said to have some rare old books which I wanted to see.

The low picket fence was almost completely down. The once large chimney in the back bedroom had fallen, and part of the roof was open to the sky. Through the gaping doorway and broken windowpanes could be seen a rusty old stove, several plow handles, a grey stone jar, and other useless impedimenta mingled with the dust of the years. There were no steps at the front of the house. Instead, a tangled mass of wistaria vines sprawled along the rotting gallery, and here and there small green lizards darted, their crimson throats inflated in fright like tiny toy balloons.

No one answered my "hello," the customary greeting of country people; so I pulled myself up by one of the rickety old pillars and made my way with difficulty to the door, a door which seemed to have a kinship with the vines that curled around it. I started to knock, but there was such a sense of desolation brooding over the seemingly abandoned house that I drew back in dread. But my trip had been a long and tiresome one, the wheels of the swaying old buggy grinding over small rocks along a worn and rough road; so I was determined to arouse someone, anyone on the place. In a last attempt I wandered around toward the back and there met a half-witted old Negro man, who very politely, though with an odd detachment, invited me to walk in and "res' my hat," adding, "Mr. Charlie done stepped down de road a piece, but he'll be back by fust dusk." I eagerly accepted the invitation and entered the poorly lighted back-hall.

There were several small pieces of mid-Victorian furniture, though nothing of any interest. However, in one corner, hung with cobwebs, stood an early American piece, a small cupboard. It was so covered with grease and dirt I rather felt than saw that it was pine. Almost all of the small thin panes of glass were out from one door, and the other door hung on a broken hinge. On the shelves were two small stacks of old plates, three lovely ones of milk glass and a few of blue printed ware. Gossipy legend has it that there was once a pair of exquisite and rare Sandwich compotes and a half dozen goblets, a variant of the "Tree of Life" design. Only one small broken compote remained and one of the goblets, both so covered with dust that it was impossible to tell the design of either.

Farther down the long hall which bisected the main body of the house was a small horsehair trunk open, and in a tilted tray I saw, in tragic contrast, a pair of new cheap silk socks, an old, red silk tie, a Victorian glove box made of tiny shells, an old lace fan and the faded ink on a yellowed letter. Near the front door and facing me was what must have been part of an old settle-chair, a combination table and chair, and opening to the right was the parlor, a room which gave a subtle insight into glory and decay, a picture which told its own story.

As I looked through the half-open double doors I thought of Hamlet's cry, "my tables, my tables," for there were some half-dozen of these, the maimed, the halt, and the blind of the furniture world, with feet and legs of infinite variety. There was an inlaid fruit-wood, stained black, which stood beside a very old butterfly table with one wing missing. Stacked in a corner were odd and broken table legs, bandy, cabriole, and straight, and on top of a smashed-in, rosewood love seat were two turned spiral legs.

As my eyes became used to the dimness of the room, they picked out an old piano stool covered with worn, red plush and moth-eaten ball fringe. Scattered on top of the outmoded square piano, I could see variously: a large family album, several daguerreotypes, an assortment of sea shells, and copies of old songs with torn and mildewed pages. On the wall above were two hollow-cut silhouettes, one an aristocratically high-nosed gentleman, the other a young and engagingly pretty woman. On the simple old mantel were two painted porcelain vases and a small figure which I imagine was of Derby bisque, whose mate no doubt had shared the fate of other treasurers, spoils of many generations. Above this hung a picture of a ship which for accuracy of modeling would defy criticism. To the right stood a wing chair, deep and hospitable, with high back and soiled tidy. The brass andirons in the large, open fireplace were almost hidden with torn letters, old hinges, a doorknob or two, tobacco, and tin cans, and over it all hung an aroma of wood ashes, though from the faded letters it was evident no fire had been lighted for years. On a small, marble-top, Victorian table directly under a window stood an etched hurricane glass, one of the loveliest I have ever seen. And strange to say this fragile piece was in perfect condition. It covered a simple Sheffield-plate candlestick.

A queer, heterogeneous collection, I said to myself, and I turned to leave; for while most old houses with their mellow flavor radiate a subtle sympathy and understanding, my reaction to this destruction was that of suffocating disgust. Besides, the slovenly carelessness and mustiness of soiled lace curtains and worn-out carpets made me feel faint, and I felt the immediate need of fresh air.

In turning I faced, though it was partly hidden now by the open door, the tall bookcase or secretary, piled high with the books I had come to see. Ordinarily I might have greeted the sight of this collection as a heaven-sent opportunity, for here at last I thought was something valuable which the old homesteader had fostered and which had not perished. Here were books of a family whose reading, I had been told, over a period of many years was incredibly wide.

From the moment I entered the old house, I had the feeling of being companioned by the past; but somehow it was not the feeling of gentle, unobtrusive and friendly "ghosts" which one is so apt to feel in the presence of old and bethumbed books, but it was that of less understanding, though invisible tenants.

I stood still, torn between an insatiable desire to investigate this rare literary find and to seek relief from the mustiness of the past. Suddenly I became conscious of titles of several books on the shelf directly on a level with my eye, Darwin's *The Origin of Species, The Descent of Man,* and other books of philosophy.

There was hardly a second between this and the sound of shuffling feet coming through what sounded like an empty room, and the clang of a door being closed. Then a voice which I can never forget, but can only describe as being so lifeless and flat that one might walk on it, said:

"You better git out of here, 'cause Mr. Charlie ain't goin' to like nobody rummagin' round 'mongst his things."

Had an owl darted from the rafters and perched on my head I would not have been surprised, but this was so totally unexpected that for a moment I was actually frightened. I turned quickly. Standing across the room with bare arms hanging limp at her side was a Negro woman, barefooted, in a loose, soiled, blue dress and faded head-handkerchief, her face so curiously grey, and her eyes so dull that she appeared incased in a fog. Silence followed, broken only by a tree branch which scraped the window to and fro. Small wonder that I should forget for the moment the chance of discovering a rare first edition, or the stale air which had seemed so unbearable; but the amazing thing was that, though my imaginary fears had so completely upset me, the sight of a soul so withered and desolate should somehow restore my confidence.

I tried as best I could to explain why I was there. I had heard that Mr. Hawkins would dispose of his books, I said, and I was anxious to see them as I was deeply interested.

"Yes," she interrupted, "I wish to de Lawd he had a got rid of them a long time ago; they ain' never done him no good nor nobody else, if you ask me."

She walked slowly into the room through the door where I had entered and down the hall.

"The front door done been boarded up. Don't nobody never come here no mo'," she said, putting into that cryptic sentence all that I had felt. Here was a once proud place now tuned in a minor key to a jumble of shattering discords.

I followed her down the back steps and across a narrow plank walk to a small cabin in the yard. "Won't you stop and talk with me just a moment," I said, "and tell me something about yourself and where you came from?" (Her dialect was different from that of the Alabama Black Belt Negro.)

With an apparent distrust not only of me but of life in general, in that same haunting and strange dialect, she answered:

"I ain' got nothin' to tell, 'cause I don't know nothin'. I'se Earthy-Ann. My mammy call me dat 'cause she say I'se so long growin' up frum de earth, and that's how come dey say I can conjure with de little low animals and steals folkses' tracks so good and make them keep wanderin'. Maybe so, I don't know. I'se been here a long time, too long if you ask me. My mammy come out here with Marse Bob from

Charleston, South C'lina, and I was born here, right here in dis here yard. I was here 'fore Marse Bob died and 'fore his two boys, Mr. Joe and Mr. Johnny, died too, and once dey's gone there ain' no comin' back. But I can't recollec' Miss Ca'line much; my 'membrance is shallow, but dey say she turned foolish in de head after while and dey took her off. I don't know nuthin' 'bout that, but I knows enough. She was a good woman and had a heap of trouble. I used to wash and iron de shirts and look after de house in dem days, en jes' like Marse Bob left hit dat's jes' like he foun' hit. Ain' nothin' left now to look after. Mr. Charlie done drunk himself to death and ev'rything on de place in ruination. Us mos' done come to de end of de row. My tiredness done come down on me now, and I'se wore out trying to look after him. But you better go 'long home now and don't let him come catch you askin' me no questions."

I apologized, and this time remembered to say that I had been invited into the house by an old Negro who was standing near the back door.

"Must a been old Bokaÿ," she said. "He used to be Marse Bob's carriage driver, but Bokay don't belong here no more dan you do. He jes' roam about, 'cause he ain't got no home, and he ain' got all what b'longs to him in de head neither. He say he comes back here to see 'bout Marse Bob's horses, but ain' no horses here to look after, ain' nothin' if you ask me; ain' a tree left even for to cut a ridin' switch."

I understood now something of her dialect. She was a Gullah Negro; at least her mother was, and it was the influence of Scotch and English still surviving in her speech, together with what I believe was a slight alcoholic overtone. But why, I wondered, should these simple words of everyday speech convey such hopelessness and despair?

A straight young mulatto girl came up the path carrying an oil can and a small bundle of broomstraw. "Here's the kerosene," she said to Earthy-Ann, "and Mr. Charlie say for you to fill up de lamp, and say he ain' comin' 'til late."

Encouraged by this I asked if I might pull up an old chair near by and sit down.

"Hit ain' my idea," the old woman said. Then taking her seat on the steps continued, "Course you can stay if you wants to, but if Mr. Charlie know hit he's goin' to git mad and fault me." Turning suddenly to the girl, she said, "Don't take dat green broomstraw in de house, Rose. De fros' ain' fell on hit yet, and I'se done had enough bad luck without dat, but I sho' needs a broom. Us will have to make it out of doors, I reckon. Mr. Charlie didn't give you no money, did he, Rose?"

The girl untied the corner of a large, besmudged handkerchief and displayed a twenty-five-cent piece. This, I learned from their conversation, was for a barbecue supper at New Hope. Rose talked of other Negroes who were going and mentioned that Aunt Phyllis and Enoch were coming by for her in the wagon. New Hope, I recalled, was the Negro Baptist church that I had passed on the road, and I had noticed the big barbecue pit and a number of Negroes busy nailing up long rough tables and benches.

Here at last was the open door. Earthy-Ann would talk of religion; any Negro will, the one thing buried so deep in the Negro's being that nothing can disturb. She might even sing one of those old emotional and syncopated laments so irresistible in its rhythmical appeal, and so I asked if she were going with Rose and Aunt Phyllis to New Hope. If she had heard the door of destiny slam shut in her face at that moment she could not have looked more utterly wretched. She waited a few seconds, then slowly raised her head and looking, not at me but far beyond said:

"No'm, I ain't goin' to no church with nobody. I ain' never jined de church 'cause I ain' never had no belief and no experience, and you can't jine without you got 'ligion. Hit's too late now, I reckon. I use to want to jine, but Mr. Charlie say 'ligion was jes' a pack of foolishness, and dat all dat shoutin' and whoopin' and hollerin' folks do wan't nothin' but foolishness neither." She paused a moment, then added, "And I thought he knowed. No'm. I didn't never jine, en hit's too late now, I reckon. I believe heven's a good place to go to though, but I can't tell you how come, 'cause I don't know nothin' much 'bout hit. I ain't never 'fessed no hope in Christ, ain' never sung none of them old songs like I hear them sing 'bout. But I feels de need to be baptized. Hit'll soon be time for me to ride on de Jerdan tide, and I ain' ready, and what is I'm goin' to do? Lawdy, Lawdy. I been thinkin' 'bout dat a heap lately, and las' night I sneezed with my mouth full of vittles and dat's a sho' sign o' death. And I believes my time is mos' out. I hear some folks say Christians can view God-a-mighty and git happy, and all you got to do is 'fess Christ, and dey tell me dey can hear little moans and things, and can walk across hell on a spider web; but I ain' never seed none o' dat. 'Fore Mammy left she told all us chillun to live for Christ 'cause hit's de onliest way, but I didn't pay her no mind, and dat was a long time ago. Marse Bob didn't 'low none of his colored folks to go to church or no meetin' in dem days, and didn't 'low them to have no books or no schoolin' 'cause dey might rise up and have trouble. Dem was sad times, if you ask me. But Marse Bob thought 'ligion was a lot of trash jes' like Mr. Charlie do now, and dey got book larnin', Mr. Charlie and dem is, and I ain't. I don't know what de Bible say 'bout hit 'cause I warn't never larnt nothin', and I can't read no printin'. I use to try to pray sometime when I'd get right lonesome. I use to shut de do' and put my head down in de washpot so hit could catch de soun', den pray easy so Mr. Charlie wouldn't hear me. I reckon if I had a prayed out loud I might of got 'ligion, but hit's too late now. Look like I jes' don't believe somehow."

And with a gesture of utter defeat she dropped her hands between her knees and said no more. She was the only Negro I had ever seen without the joy of living or who could not look with longing upon the peace of life after death. As I looked on the tired and crumpled figure, I realized that in all this section of ignorance, superstition, and hookworm, I had never seen a gloom like that of this picture of simple people who have suffered so needlessly for someone else's purposes.

They are born imitators, the Negroes, and the selection of their models is often a matter of accident. Here the books of Marse Bob and Mr. Charlie had torn down an ancient faith in a half-baked, too easily malleable mind, without putting anything constructive in its place.

Earthy-Ann's mother had been bought a slave, taken up by her roots from her native land and transplanted in foreign soil. And now Earthy-Ann, grown old, identified as she is with the two races whose blood she shares in that peculiar relation which one sees so often in the South, is cut off from the life of one, living in the midst of another which uses her (there is no doubt of that) but does not take her in. First adopting anything told her, now doubting her own doubts, life has become a terrible muddle.

This then was the story of the old house, as it stood there an accusing monument to past mistakes and the utter futility of possession. The story of desolation that had been wrought in the life of a simple Negro woman, whose need of faith had been implanted in the fibers of her being through countless generations.

I climbed into the old buggy, feeling that "nothing is ever finished or left behind forever," and as I turned to avoid a sawed-off stump, I waved a friendly hand. But Earthy-Ann sat motionless, the surface calm unbroken, accepting discouragement and defeat with that heartbreaking patience that is so characteristic of her race.

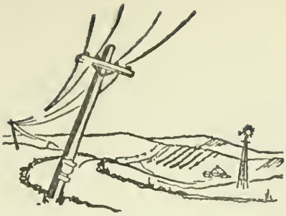
WYOMING HAS WILD HORSES

C. A. Millspaugh

In Wyoming there are wild horses.
Down to the streams in the Springtime,
Loud hooves in the dust, in the sunshine,
Manes up at the neck, tails long, by the wind fanned,
Wild horses are thunder over the plains.
Knee-deep they stand in the rivers,
Heads down they nuzzle the waters;
At the least twig-crack or a leaf-fall
Heads lift, eyes stare, and their lips blow.
In the cities of the plains there are few horses;
But the people where they starve will remember—
The girls in their walk, in the flirt of the head,
The woman in the dark where the babe cries.
Hot dirt and cooked grass has Wyoming,
And bones ride the rocks on the ranges
Where the fool and the famous have famished.
Yet the wild horses run in the Spring.

Men know that have seen no wild horses
How manes flicked with sunlight blow over brooks,
And they in their souls say this for their peace:
Wild horses still run in Wyoming!

Deep where the world was first going
In Wyoming there were these wild horses,
And stiff under grass our hope would be graved
If far in Wyoming there were no wild horses
To run in the Spring, to the streams.



Homestead Women

Pearl Price Robertson

FACING westward from Big Sandy, Alec and I and the children drove twenty miles to the quarter section which was to be our home on the wide wind-swept Montana prairie; and just before sundown we stopped on the spot where our shack was to be. Westward lay the Goosebill, long and low; northward the Sweetgrass hills on the Canadian border, crowned with snow; behind us the Bearpaws made a jagged line against the sky; far to the south in the blue distance loomed the Highwoods. The sun shone on the grass sparkling with raindrops; the wild sweetpeas nodded their yellow heads in friendly greeting. As I looked across the rolling expanse of prairie, fired with the beauty of a Montana sunset, I sent a little prayer of thanksgiving up from my heart for this, our very first home! Only a rectangle of prairie sod, raw and untouched by the hand of man, but to us it was a kingdom.

I loved the prairie, even while I feared it. God's country, the old-timers called it. There is something about it which *gets* a man—or a woman. I feared its relentlessness, its silence, and its sameness, even as I loved the tawny spread of its sun-drenched ridges, its shimmering waves of desert air, burning stars in a midnight sky. Still in my dreams I can feel the force of that wind, and hear its mournful wail around my shack in the lonely hours of the night! How many times I watched the stars at night, fires of heaven shining through, as I waited listening for the rumble of Alec's wagon.

The rollicking wind promptly bowled our tent over, that first night at our new home; so again we slept in our wagon. The only water we had for any purpose was contained in a gallon jug, and we did not know how soon nor where we could get more. Consequently, we drank sparingly and in little sips, and bathed our hands and faces in the dewy grass of the morning. We never could keep the tent up—but what matter?—our neighbor lent us the use of a little shack across the way until our own shack was built. There we camped the first few weeks. We had no stove or firewood that first day. No, I had not learned to burn cowchips yet; *that* was an innovation which came later. Alec went back to town to bring out our first load of lumber, and the children and I put on our wraps and, to keep out the chill, huddled beneath our blankets in the shack. It took most of the day and well into the night to make the trip into town and return with a load; so in the evening I hung up a lighted lantern to guide Alec on his return to the shack. At first we set the kitchen range up out-of-doors, but rain and disagreeable weather made this impractical; then we moved it within, and since there was no hole in the roof, stuck the pipe out through the little hole in the side which served for a window. The stove and the folding-bed filled almost the entire space. There was no room for table or chairs; so mostly when mealtime came we stood and ate from the plates which we held in our hands. The walls were of unmatched lumber, which let in the wind and rain, but at least over us there was a roof. We were real Westerners now, and could not shrink from anything which was to be our portion.

The greatest hardship of all was the scarcity of water. The first settlers had dug wells, which eighty to ninety feet down were still dry as dust. At first we were filled with dismay to find no water anywhere; sometimes we had none even to drink until Alec bought a barrel which he filled with water each day when in town and brought home on top of his load of lumber. We had to stint ourselves extremely for water for bathing, and as for our clothing I washed it a few pieces at a time in the washbasin, because there was no water to fill the tub! We located some water-holes and coulees where occasionally we could get water for our horses, but often we had to go many miles for it. My throat constricted with pain when I thought of the well we had planned with which I meant to irrigate my lovely dream-garden. It now seemed very remote indeed! Later a shallow well was dug in the coulee a mile away, and it yielded us a small amount of water each day.

Once that spring when we went to the coulee for water the cattlemen were holding their last big roundup on that prairie, since the homesteaders had taken their range; they had established camp by the water-hole and had just butchered a young steer. Here was a bit of the old West about which I had read—the branding iron on the smoldering fire, the rope corral, the chuck-wagon, the riders with wide sombreros, hairy "chaps" and jingling spurs! While we were filling our water-barrel one of the cowboys came over, and with a grand sweep of his broad hat, smilingly proffered us a piece of the freshly butchered beef. Could he have known how much we appreciated his gift, or by any chance have guessed how lean was the larder in the little shack at home?

We worked happily at our building during every minute of our spare time; I held the boards while Alec sawed and nailed them, and in a few weeks, the new shack, fourteen feet by twenty feet, with two windows and a door, was ready to move into. Joyfully I worked with rugs, curtains, and other things dear to a woman's heart, making it pretty and livable.

Alec plowed a small plot for a garden and I attempted the disheartening task of planting it—disheartening because amid the hard dry chunks of sod I could find no loose soil for covering the seeds. Patiently I took up the sods one by one, and with my hands pounded and shook soil from the matted grass roots and carefully patted it over my seeds. But disillusionment sat heavy upon me; as I worked, the tears fell, and truly I "watered my furrows with tears." No more rains came, the grass shriveled and dried up, and shimmering heat waves danced across the landscape. The only seed in my garden which found moisture enough to grow were the beans, and then as soon as the seed leaves appeared above the ground the chickens promptly snapped them off. My first garden on the homestead became only a sad memory.

How much I feared the rattlesnake, not on my own account alone, but for the sake of my little children! I warned them repeatedly as they played about the dooryard to look out for "ugly creeping things" and to beware of buzzing noises. But we never saw any—*not one!* One day as Alec and I walked about our so-called garden we noticed a great black beetle shambling along among the clods and pointed it out to our little son. Imagine how I felt when the little fellow shrank back, his face pale and eyes round with fear as he gasped out, "A rattlesnake!"

Life on the homestead was becoming a serious problem to us now; our money was all gone and food supplies almost exhausted. There was still a little flour, and a bit of lard. There was no yeast or other leavening; for bread I mixed the flour with water and a little lard, and baked it in small cakes. There was rice, but no sugar; so I put in a few raisins for sweetening. There was absolutely nothing else, so far as I can now recall. Alec was faced with the necessity of leaving his family on the homestead while he went in search of work. I tried to be very brave, but my heart sank at the thought of facing life in that lonely place without Alec. Many of our neighbors, too, went away looking for work, so that I was left very much alone except when some distant settler passed by, sometimes bringing my mail and supplies. At times for days I saw no one; and then the terrifying loneliness and silence of the great prairie appalled me, and I sobbed aloud to shut out the eerie sound of the coyote's wail, or the dreary soughing of the wind beneath the eaves of my shack. I went to the coulee a mile away each day for water, and occasionally the children and I made the trip afoot to the store and post office; but as these trips always left us all very much exhausted, we did not attempt them often. Alec wrote every week, sometimes oftener, and his letters were always a delight—long, and filled with details of his work and associations. After one of his letters came I could forget my loneliness and sing at my work for hours.

I busied my mind and my hands with homely little tasks, making over garments for the children's wear and preparing a layette for the new baby soon to come. I sighed over the layette, for mostly it was composed of clothes which my other babies had worn, and I found myself longing intensely for at least *one* new little garment for the precious darling. I had a large-sized sugar sack which had been carelessly tossed into Alec's wagon one day at the store; this I carefully snipped open, washed, bleached in the sun, and pressed. I drew threads painstakingly and made a drawn-work yoke of exquisite pattern, hemstitched ruffles for the neck and sleeves, and with a deep hem at the bottom it became a dainty little dress, which, with a sense of deepest satisfaction, I laid away in readiness for my baby's coming.

Summer waned, and the frosty mornings and the calm sunshiny days of autumn came on. Alec was to come for us soon, as he was making plans to take us to the Judith Basin where he worked, so that I might have the care of a doctor and a nurse in my hour of need. I wrote to Alec setting the date for his coming in early October, since I expected my baby in November, giving myself, or so I thought, ample time to make the trip and get rested afterward. Twenty-four hours after mailing that letter I was startled by premonitory pains of an alarming nature, and as they constantly recurred at decreasing intervals I became more and more uneasy. . . . Could I have been mistaken in the time? . . . Could this be approaching childbirth? . . . Maybe if I rested quietly for awhile . . . maybe, oh! maybe . . . no, there was no longer any doubt, my baby would arrive before the letter could reach Alec, before competent help could ever reach me! . . . Heaven help me now; I must think what to do!

Calmly I went about preparations, trying hard to keep a firm grip upon myself, trying hard not to become panicky. I *must* be brave; I must keep my head. Babies had been born before like this . . . and everything was all right—oh, if I were only sure what to do! If I only had someone—anyone, to look to for help! I watched for a little boy who occasionally rode past my shack in search of his cows which roamed the prairie, and luckily tonight he came within calling distance. "Johnnie, take this note to your mother!" "What is it, a party?" the boy asked eagerly, as he took the note. "I want your mother, I need her help! Oh, please hurry!" I gasped. The grey pony bounded forward and disappeared into the gathering dusk. As darkness came on, I put the children to bed and waited tensely for the help which *must* not fail me! Prayerfully I waited—and walked the floor listening, listening—almost in despair as my need grew greater. Such a wave of relief surged over me as I heard scurrying footsteps in the darkness! My sister-in-law arrived, frightened and tearful, and Mrs. Warren, capable, motherly, master of the situation at once. An hour later my wee new daughter was born!

Call it premonition or otherwise, Alec decided to surprise me by coming home much sooner than I was expecting him, and at the same hour that I was waiting for help to come in my desperate need, he was speeding toward home as fast as a train could take him. The train pulled into Big Sandy a few minutes after midnight and Alec stepped out into the darkness without a moment's pause and set out to walk the twenty miles to the shack on the great brown prairie, which held his loved ones. He arrived home soon after daybreak, to find me in bed, flushed with happiness, a newborn daughter by my side.

Two more boys were born to us, and then in rapid succession two more daughters. The family prospered, so that at last we could spend all our time on the homestead. We owned a car and the fourteen-by-twenty shack became a five-room cottage, but never was it the home of our youthful dreams. My lovely garden, so soul-satisfying and enchanting, was never aught but a beautiful dream. The trees we planted pined away and died for lack of water, while my flowers bent their frail heads and the brazen sun turned them into nothingness. The war had come, bringing with it high prices for the farmer's grain, and copious rainfall had blest the settlers' efforts with bounteous harvests. The four elevators of the prairie town were kept filled to overflowing with golden grain, and every day the golden flood poured in, hundreds of wagons waiting for freight cars, so that the farmers might take turns unloading their precious cargoes. With wheat at $1.87 a bushel and granaries and bins filled to bursting, the settlers bought more land and high-priced machinery to grow more and bigger crops "to help win the war." But the bad years came when we staked our *all* on the caprice of the weather and a wheat crop which might never be harvested. As drouth, weeds, cutworms, and hailstorms took their toll from the grain fields, the eager illuminating light of hope died out of the settlers' faces and gave place to a look of morbid apathy and despair. We looked across the broad acres of stunted, shriveled crops, dotted with Russian thistles, and the mortgages mounted higher and the bankers clamored for their interest.

Then came a year when no rains fell and no crops grew, and the bewildered settlers faced a winter with no money, no food, no clothing for their families, no feed of any kind for their livestock, no work. Dumb with despair, the men set about finding some means of providing for their families; most of them went away to work while the women and little children stayed on in the homes, carrying on as best they might. Alec found a job on a ranch near Billings. When he went away I was left on the homestead once more without him, but this time with nine children instead of three, the youngest a baby three weeks old.

Alec sent every dollar of his wages home as fast as it was earned, yet with me the winter was one long struggle with circumstances to keep my family warmed and fed and to save our horses from starvation. Upon the horses depended our ability to put in one more crop. With the help of my twelve-year-old boy I braved the storms, waded snowdrifts to keep the horses fed, and stood upon an icy platform in below-zero weather drawing water while the horses crowded and pushed about the watering trough. Topsy, the black mare, had a young colt running with her and we decided it was best to wean the colt; so we shut him in the barn, leaving the mare outside. But the faithful mother refused to desert her offspring and took up her post just outside the barn door, calling to him in anxious whinnies or soft nickers of love. All night long she kept the vigil; refusing to seek shelter for herself, she stood where the keen blasts of an icy wind struck with fullest force. When morning came Willie and I found her crumpled form in the snow by the barn door, frozen dead! Mother and son, we wept together over the loss of a faithful friend, while the wind ruffled the icy mane and sent little eddies of drifting snow across the frozen body. Two other horses we lost that winter, and each time I felt the loss keenly, as that of a valued friend; but when spring came we still had nine left of our twelve—gaunt, shaggy creatures, covered with vermin.

The feed for my pigs gave out. When a week had gone by I thought desperately of trying to butcher the sorry little creatures. I wept over their plight, but my woman's nature quailed at the thought of undertaking the butchering alone with no help but Willie's. At last my brother-in-law and two neighbor lads came to help, but the day we set for the butchering was bitter cold with freezing blasts of snow-laden wind sweeping out of the north. Scalding and scraping the pigs was a painful task as the water cooled and changed to ice rapidly; but at last the eight of them were cleaned and scraped after a fashion and left hanging in the shed while we ate our dinner. We ate hurriedly, so as to return to our task before freezing interfered with cutting the meat into pieces for curing. But when one of the lads hurried out ahead to examine the pigs he called back, "They're frozer'n hell right now!"

Stiffly swinging from the rafters, the pigs hung like craven images carved of stone; no knife could penetrate the frozen forms. To save fuel we moved the kitchen range into the large living room—here, too, had been placed our beds—and here we carried the frozen pigs and placed them in formidable array across the dining table; they stood at various rakish angles, each firmly upon his feet, ears outspread and tails extending stiffly straight out behind, to be left until they thawed out. I sat up late that night keeping a brisk fire burning and writing a letter to Alec. It was so cold the timbers of the house popped, and the frost crept higher and ever higher up the door. The hands of the clock pointed almost to midnight. Suddenly I was startled by footsteps in the frozen snow and my name called in a familiar voice. "Open the door quick! We've a girl out here who's nearly frozen!" Hastily I opened the door and recognized Dan, a friend of the family, and another man supporting between them a slender young girl. We carried her inside, where I removed her thin shoes and rubbed her aching hands and feet. When she was warmed and resting comfortably Dan turned about, glanced at my sleeping children in the cots, and then at the frozen pigs on the table. "My God!" he said.

The girl—a homesick child—had been attending school in Big Sandy, and longing to spend the Thanksgiving vacation with home folks, had attempted a twenty-five-mile ride atop a load of coal, when the thermometer stood at thirty degrees below zero. I took her into bed with me for the rest of the night and the men went to a neighbor's.

Thanksgiving morning dawned clear and cold; the morning sun shone across a white and frozen world lying crisp and still in the crinkling, frosty air. The Russian thistles had caught the drifts and each was a hummock of glittering snow—no sign of life in the white expanse except the smoke which curled lazily upward from the housetops dotting the prairie. My little guest of the night before continued her journey that day and reached home in time to partake of Thanksgiving dinner with home folks.

One of my greatest problems was bringing supplies from town, especially hay and fuel. Never having money enough at a time to buy any great quantity, I lived in abject terror of exhausting my supply before I could get more. Alec wrote: "If your fuel gives out, burn the fence posts, tear boards from the barn and burn them, burn *anything* about the place—don't take any chances of freezing!" Sometimes when food supplies ran low I was driven to parcelling out our meals in bits, and at times the pinched, ill-nourished look on the faces of my children made me sick with apprehension. Once in the coldest weather it was imperative that we get supplies from town. I hesitated to send my boy, small and frail as he was, but there seemed no other way. Pridefully, manfully, he set out with the team and sled, in company with his uncle, to bring hay, coal, potatoes, flour and sugar; there was little else we could afford to buy. The roads were piled with frozen drifts, so that bringing out a loaded sled was a slow and tedious matter, and the boy, inadequately clothed and with ragged overshoes many sizes too large, walked stumblingly through the snowdrifts all the long way from town behind the slow-moving sled. It was hours after dark before I heard the jingling of the harness and the creaking runners of the returning sleds. The boy reached home shaking with cold and reeling with exhaustion. As I worked over the worn-out child, rubbing with snow his numbed hands and frost-bitten feet, my mother's heart swelled with fierce, hot rebellion over the fate which imposed such hardship upon so young a child; I made a swift, determined resolve not to let my children be crushed by the sordidness of circumstances, to secure for them their just measure of the beauty and brightness of life, and to make up to them by every means at my command for the privations they now endured.

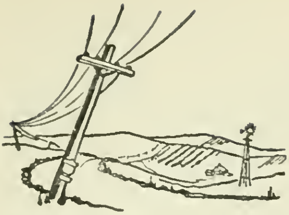
December brought a chinook and the snow disappeared with the warm southwest wind like ice beneath a July sun. Water filled the puddles, overflowed the ponds, and rushed in torrents down the coulees. No longer need I worry about hauling water, for the rest of that season at least!

Christmas day the neighbors gathered at my home for a community Christmas dinner. None had much, but all brought something, and assembled, it seemed an abundance. Jollity, friendship, and good-will radiated from the fun-loving crowd, the day being shadowed for me only by the lack of Alec's presence. It was but one of many good times the community shared together.

Alec returned with the coming of spring and together we planned the planting of one more crop. During the long winter months another plan had been slowly forming in my mind, a plan to which I gained Alec's reluctant consent. Leaving my nine-months-old baby in the care of a neighbor, I washed and pressed my one dress, mended the only shoes I possessed, and in a shabby black coat and khaiki hat I went to town to write the examinations for a Montana teacher's certificate. Timidly at first, then glowingly as I warmed to my subjects, I wrote and wrote; and then feverishly awaited the returns from Helena. When I was once more the happy possessor of a teacher's certificate I went to my local board of trustees and asked for a position, and they were too surprised to say "no." Three years I taught my own and my neighbors' children, and some of the happiest hours of my life were spent in that tiny prairie schoolhouse where zealously I tried, out of my own knowledge and experience, to bring beauty and joy into the lives of the thirty-three children whose only experiences had been those of the drab life on the bleak prairie. All the love I put into my work there has been returned to me a thousandfold. The money I earned helped to feed and clothe my family and started my boy to high school.

Courageously but hopelessly the settlers struggled on, trying vainly with borrowed money to battle the elements, to tame the desert, and to carve home and fortune out of the raw land. Then came the grasshoppers, newly hatched, swarming out of the unplowed fields and covering the growing crops with a gray, slimy, creeping cloud which hour by hour steadily advanced, wiping out the greenness of the land, leaving only dry, bare clods in the fields. Despair over the ravaged crops filled the farmers' hearts.

On the billowing, russet prairie stands an empty farmhouse, its windows gone and doors sagging; beneath its eaves the wind soughs mournfully; the desert sand drifts around its doorsteps; and the Russian thistle tumbles past. Desolate, silent it stands— grim witness to the frustration of a man's hopes and a woman's dreams. . . . We have no regrets; life is fuller and sweeter through lessons learned in privation, and around our homestead days some of life's fondest memories still cling. We are of Montana, now and always; boosters still. And in a fair valley of western Montana where the melting snows of the Mission Range trickle out in clear streams across the thirsty land, our dreams of the long ago are slowly taking on life. The grass grows green about my doorstep, the vines clamber about my porch, the flowers bloom, the birds sing, and Alec's much-loved Brown Swiss cattle graze in lush fields. The little children who shared the privations of homestead life—three sons and seven daughters—are growing into a splendid family, a pride and a blessing every one. In the past six years five of them have graduated from the local high school, one is a member of the senior class, and two are freshmen; one is a business-college graduate and two have graduated from a state normal school. Tonight, as I write, the mellow glow of our electric lights shines over our happy home circle, the rooms vibrant from the tinkle of a piano, the melodious wail of a violin, and the lilt of happy youthful voices. I feel that creating a home and rearing a family in Montana has been a grand success, and my cup seems filled to overflowing with the sweetness and joy of living.



The Cloud Puncher

William Cunningham

YOU always hear a lot of stories about these cyclones blowin' straws into houses, about the feller hangin' out a sack of meal and the twister blowin' the sack away and leavin' the meal hangin' there, but I seen a thing happen when I was a boy workin' on a ranch out in Kansas, and they ain't no use talkin', that was a thing I ain't never heard anything to beat it.

They was a pony buster, name of Tiny Fallon, which was because he was so small we called him Tiny, being not five feet high. And that's why we called him Tiny. Well, Tiny was not to say very smart. That is, I guess he was bright enough. About like the rest of us when you come right down to it. But what I mean he didn't have sense enough to be afraid of anything.

They wasn't anything Tiny couldn't ride. He could ride the worst horse you ever seen. I seen horses pitch all the fleas off, tryin' to git rid of Tiny, and pitch the hair off their back, and not git out from under him. I never seen Tiny lose his head or pull leather.

Sometimes the fellers would rope up a wild steer and Tiny would git on without a string and ride that steer. And he never would ride 'em backwards, like fellers do, holdin' to their tail. You know how a steer is. Seems like his hind laigs is longer than his front laigs and his back bone slopes so that soon as he starts stickin' his front feet in the ground you jist naturally slide down on his horns. Well, Tiny never slid down like that. You wouldn't believe it, the way he could ride. He always waved his hat and yelled. You never seen a feller ride like that; I mean ride as good as Tiny.

One trouble with Tiny, he would git drunk in town and would ride home like a bat outa hell and every once in a while he'd kill a good saddle horse that way. I remember once he had the best mare in that part of the country and he rode her ten or fifteen miles on the dead lope, although he knowed she was with colt, and he killed her. Sometimes he didn't have a lick of sense.

Well, one spring they was mighty uncertain weather and bad twisters that we heard of, and sometimes we seen 'em off a little ways like funnels travelin' along in the sky and settlin' down once in a while to pull up dirt or cattle or anything that happened to be there. Them things is bad, you know. They ain't nothin' they can't do.

One day, of a Sunday afternoon, a bunch of us was loafin' around waitin' for the boys from another outfit that was gonna play baseball with us. The sky got mean-lookin' and we was talkin' about goin' to a dugout, when all at once they was a twister comin' right at us. Well, we run for the dugout, all but Tiny. It seemed like he didn't have sense enough to be afraid of the thing. That was one trouble with Tiny. He didn't have a lot of sense, and he didn't know when he ought to git scared.

We was runnin' and lookin' back, and Tiny was walkin' along not in any hurry, and that blamed twister got him. Yanked him right up, all sprawled out. And there he went. The last we seen him he was a hundred feet in the air, right side up, and he was wavin' his hat, jist from habit. He didn't know anything else to do.

We was sorry to see Tiny took off like that. He was a good feller and everybody liked him although he didn't have any too much sense. And some of the boys said it was a nice sight, him wavin' his hat, and if Tiny had to go, well, he might as well go like that.

And some of the boys said the twister would drop him astraddle of a barbed-wire fence and split him lengthways, and some thought it would slide him through one along the ground and slice him the other way like a baloney. The next day when we rode fence we looked for pieces of Tiny either split or sliced, because nobody was very sure of his own opinion and you never can tell what a cyclone will do.

Well, it was about a week, and we all got over lookin' for Tiny. We got word to the boys in the other outfits and they looked for him but didn't find him.

Then they was a bad night, and we all got scared on account of what had happened to Tiny, and we left the bunkhouse and went into the old dugout which was safer. When things quietened a little bit we come out, not really expectin' to find any bunkhouse, but there it was, and when we went in to bed we found Tiny in his old bunk, asleep.

We woke him up and asked him what in thunder had happened to him, but he was too sleepy. He said he was dog-tired, and he'd tell us next day. And that was all we could get out of him. He finally got mad because we wouldn't leave him sleep; so we shut up and waited to the next day.

Well, the next day we asked him again and he said: "Well, boys, it happened mighty funny, and I wished I'd had my saddle along."

And we asked him was he crazy, and he said he wasn't, and he said: "You see, boys, I broke that blamed twister to ride, and I come back to git my saddle."

Well, acourse that made us mad, for him to start coddin' us, that was old friends of his and been in that country a long time. And we started walkin' off to the corral, and he said: "Wait a minute, boys," and he sounded real sincere. He said: "I don't blame you boys for takin' it like that, but it's the god's truth. I rode it darned near to the mountains before I could git it under control, and then it wasn't no easy thing to head it back this way. I kept wishin' I had my saddle. I rode it in last night. You boys seen the storm yourself."

Well, he sounded so blamed sincere that we didn't feel like knockin' his head off. And we made signs to each other and decided he was crazy and we'd have to humor the poor feller for a while till he got back in his right mind.

He went on talkin'. He said: "Now the hardest thing to do was to train it not to put its foot down where it would do any hurt. It don't put a foot down very often, but when it does they's likely to be damage, and you've got to watch careful, like you do for gopher holes when you're ridin' a horse."

"Well, now, where is this twister of yours?" somebody asked him to make him feel good, and he said: "Well, they ain't no place to put one up; so I had to turn it out to graze last night, and I hope it ain't done no particular damage around here."

Now that was pretty bad, even if he was crazy, and we was sore and he seen we was, and he said: "Well, boys, I really don't blame you none. It don't sound very reasonable. I guess I'll be goin' now, and I like you boys a lot and I hope they ain't no hard feelin's."

He went in the bunkhouse and got his saddle and put it down on the ground, and we felt sorry, and we said: "You ain't goin' afoot, are you, Tiny?"

And he said: "No, I ain't goin' afoot." And he whistled real loud.

Well, it was a clear mornin' up to then, but they was the blackest cloud you ever seen come whirlin' up from the west, and the dirt was foggin' over a patch of plowed ground. And we seen the twister comin', and it scared us like the devil, and we run to the dugout.

Well, Tiny stood there, with his saddle between his feet, and that twister swooped down. We was watchin' out of the dugout, scared to death. And it swooped down neat and it didn't touch a thing, and it picked Tiny up with the saddle under him. The way he squirted into the air would make your hair stand on end. It was the blamedest sight I ever seen. With things whirlin' all around him, he was ridin' straight, leanin' back in the saddle, and he took off his hat and waved it to us. In a couple of seconds he was just a speck, and then he was gone. The storm swung around in a big circle and headed west, and the funnel went high for a while and then settled in the brush pasture, scarin' a herd of yearlin's but not harmin' 'em a bit.

Well, that's the last we ever seen of Tiny. We heard later that he was doin' well and makin' good money further out west, herdin' clouds.

Yeah, herdin' clouds. You see, them ranchers in the dry country would git pretty hard up for rain and they was willin' to pay good money for a two- or three-inch gully-washer. So Tiny would ride over the mountains, so we heard, and pick up a herd of good rain clouds and push them to a ranch. He'd bunch 'em and bed 'em down till they rained whatever the rancher was payin' for.

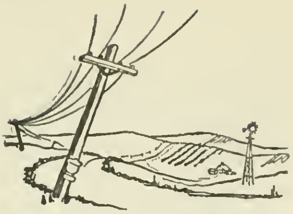
He charged by the inch, but the price on each inch was steeper, because rain clouds is hard to handle. They're like milk cows; you can't run 'em much or they'll lose their rain. And a good bunch ain't easy to find. Now Tiny would chase you up a shower to settle the dust for little or nothin'. An inch rain was reasonable but two inches was more than twice as much as one inch, and so on. That's the way he charged, so we heard. For a four-inch rain a rancher had to pay good and heavy, and I don't blame Tiny a bit, because of what he must of went through breakin' that twister.

It was too bad the way Tiny finally ended up. He was ridin' around at night one night, which was bad because he couldn't see where his twister was steppin', and the thing settled down on a saloon and twisted up a whole stock of liquor, includin' a bottle opener. Well, Tiny he couldn't resist, and he got drunk as a lord, and you know what he done?

He rode that twister all the way up and down the Rockies. You know, mountains is bad for twisters. They stay around the prairies mostly, because they don't like rough goin' no more than a horse does. And Tiny didn't pay no mind to the condition his twister was in, and he rode it from Canada to Mexico, hell-bent for election. Well, he broke its wind and a wind-broke twister ain't worth nothin'.

And besides, he musta knowed the condition it was in. All at once it started havin' a litter of whirlwinds. That's how careless Tiny was. And it dropped dead on him. Now it ain't so bad to have a horse drop dead. Maybe you git a nasty spill. But this twister died when Tiny was about five hundred feet in the air, and there wasn't nothin' left but a bunch of little orphan whirlwinds caperin' around and not one of 'em broke to ride. Anyway a young whirlwind can't hardly blow your hat off, let alone support a man.

Well, they never was much of Tiny, and after he hit the ground he was so scattered that they couldn't hardly scrape up enough of him to make a good funeral. Which comes from not havin' common horse sense. It was too bad, because Tiny was a fine feller, when you got right down to it.



Oilfield Idyl

Daniel M. Garrison

LAWYER JIM

HOWDY, Hutch, what's that you got in that can?"

"Worms."

"Going fishing?"

"Yeh, Lawyer Jim is giving another one of them fishing parties."

"Lawyer Jim?"

"Yeh, don't you know Jim McCann?"

"The county attorney?"

"Yeh, he's the best lawyer in the state; that is, when he's sober, and when he's drunk he's the best lawyer in the whole goddam world."

"How come he asked you to go fishing?"

"I always go fishing with him. I'm on the jury."

"What you mean? There ain't no trials a-going on."

"We hold our trials out on the river bank. Lawyer Jim is going to defend Borger Reds tonight. He's up for killing his wife."

"Borger Reds?"

"Yeh; but Lawyer Jim will bring him clear. He always does."

"You mean Borger Reds, that good-for-nothing bum that racks balls at Jake Everett's pool hall?"

"Yeh."

"Why, he ain't even married."

"That don't make no difference."

"How come it don't make no difference? You've got to have a wife before you can kill her off, don't you?"

"Not in them trials on the river bank."

"What the goddam hell is this—just a bunch of carryings-on?"

"Sure, what the hell did you think it was— real court?"

"Yeh, I thought you meant real court, seeing Jim McCann was there."

"Why, Lawyer Jim is just one of the boys. We have them court trials all the time."

"Sure enough?"

"Yeh; Lawyer Jim he drops in at the pool hall 'bout once a month and gives us boys the high sign. Then I gets the worms; Borger Reds gets the whisky; Duke gets the victuals for the mulligan; Bud Atterbury gets the trout line; and Billie Keever gets the pot for the mulligan. Of course Lawyer Jim pays for all this stuff, 'cause we ain't got nothing. Then all us tramps meets him out by Ignorant Hill and loads up in his car, a damn big car, and takes out for the North Canadian River. If we don't have a time for ourselves! There ain't nobody like Lawyer Jim—the smartest, orneriest, big-heartedest, drunkenest one man I ever knowed or ever heard tell of."

"Tell me some more 'bout Lawyer Jim."

"Lawyer Jim and me is buddies. When he ain't a working we is always together. Lawyer Jim use to be on the bum. Yes, sir, he didn't do a lick of work till he was nineteen year old; just mooched and slept in wheat stacks. Then he gets rained out so he goes to school and studies law. Talk 'bout smart, that boy is just as smart as a whip. There ain't a better lawyer in the state.

"I'll never forget the time a young nigger buck comes up to Lawyer Jim's office. I was there just a-beefing with him. Wahl, this young nigger buck comes up there and tells Lawyer Jim his stepdaddy was mistreating him—beats him every day just for nothing. Lawyer Jim rears up and starts storming round the room like a wild man. 'Burrhead,' he says (he knows all them niggers; use to go out and live with them for weeks; that is, till the whisky and beer give out; then he'd come home)—'Burrhead,' he says, 'you go down to Tom Gassaway's hardware store and buy yourself the biggest gun they's got and go out and shoot that crazy nigger. Now you go and do what I tell you and make a good job of it. I'll bring you clear; don't you worry 'bout that.' Wahl, by God, in two hours the 'laws' had that nigger buck in jail. Yes, sir, he shot his stepdaddy's fool head off just like Lawyer Jim told him to do. And in two weeks that nigger buck was a-walking the streets just like me and you. Yes, sir, he cleared him, just like he said he was a-going to."

"How in the hell did he clear him? Didn't they know for certain that he shot the nigger?"

"Sure they knowed it, but you think them 'laws' and lawyers pay any mind to the true evidence? Why, them rascals fix the evidence to suit themselves. Sure, that's the way they work them trials; Lawyer Jim told me so hisself.

"Now there is Hiram Smock, a Cammelite preacher. He stole a mule from Widow Hubbard and everybody knowed he stole the mule, 'cause they seen him a-riding it to them revivals they was a-holding last summer over there at Sand Creek Grove. Wahl, Lawyer Jim defends him in court, 'cause as Lawyer Jim said they both run the same kind of graft on the people. Course the preacher's graft getting money for saving souls is more risky than Lawyer Jim's graft, 'cause he has to reckon with the Old Man; that is, if there is an Old Man, and just 'cause there ain't no signs there is, there still might be and then it would go tough on the old preacher, plenty tough. Lawyer Jim he's just got to reckon with the people and that ain't much of a job for a smart man like Lawyer Jim is. Anyhow, he defends that old preacher and brings him clear."

"How did he do it?"

"Wahl, they was a-having the trial and everything was a-going against the preacher 'cause they had the goods right on him. Lawyer Jim he just sets there and don't even open his mouth. He don't even ask no questions of them witnesses—just sets there and keeps dumb. Wahl, sir, the jury was just 'bout to go out and get the verdict and bring it in when the old preacher throws a fit, and what a fit! He falls to the floor all doubled up and starts beating hisself on the chest with his fists, and such howling and carrying on I ain't never seen the like of. They had to pick him up and carry him out. Then Lawyer Jim puts three witnesses on the stand that testifies that the old preacher had them fits all the time. The judge he dismisses the case 'cause he says he ain't a-going to try no fitified man. He ain't never done it yet and he ain't a-going to start in now. Lawyer Jim, the old rascal, knowed all the time how the judge stood on them fitified people."

"The preacher was subject to them fits, huh?"

"Why, hell no, Lawyer Jim framed the whole thing. That was the first fit that preacher had ever threw. Yes, sir, them lawyers is plenty smart when it comes to fixing the evidence to clear them people they is defending. . . ."

"Tell me some more 'bout Lawyer Jim."

"Lawyer Jim says 'cept for preachers and politicians there ain't no bigger graft than the law business. Why, he says it keeps him a-worrying all the time a-fearing people will find out there ain't nothing to this here calling in a lawyer to fix up your own business or mess up somebody else's. A man is right or wrong, and a lot of foreign words and all them monkeyshines they pull in them courts ain't never proved nothing yet. All them lawyers do is to make out you're lying or you ain't lying. It don't make no difference if you tell the truth and they know you is telling the truth, them lawyers will make out you're lying. Yes, sir, that's why Lawyer Jim's such a good lawyer; he's just naturally ornery. Most lawyers ain't fit company for honest folks."

"Tell me 'bout them trials on the river bank."

"Boy, now them is what I calls real trials. The last one we had, Bud Atterbury was up for killing his wife."

"Both Bud and Borger Reds kill their old women?"

"Yeh, Bud made out so good in his trial that Borger Reds he decided he'd kill his wife for the next one."

"Tell me 'bout Bud's trial."

"Wahl, sir, we meets Lawyer Jim out there by Ignorant Hill and takes out in the car for the North Canadian. When we gets there we makes camp and sets out our trout lines. We do all that first so we can get it off our mind. Then we makes a big mulligan, 'bout eight-dollar bulk, and then, by God, we starts on the whisky. Along 'bout dark we is all feeling mighty good; so we opens court and swears in the jury. After going through all them monkeyshines like they do in real court, Lawyer Jim puts Bud Atterbury on the stand.

" 'Bud Atterbury,' says Lawyer Jim, 'did you kill your wife?'

" 'Yeh, I killed her,' says Bud.

" 'Mr. Atterbury, would you mind a-telling the jury just why and how you killed your wife?'

" 'Wahl,' says Bud, 'I killed her all right. There ain't no need to fret 'bout that 'cause she's one dead woman. If I says it myself, I done a good job of it.'

" 'Very good, Mr. Atterbury, but *why* did you kill her!' bellows Lawyer Jim a-pointing his finger right in Bud's face and looking as wise as a treeful of owls. Bud he takes a drink and Lawyer Jim he takes one; so the jury calls a recess and we takes one too. Then we calls court to order and starts the trial again.

" 'Wahl, sir,' says Bud, 'me and my old woman we ain't never had no peace, always a-fighting and a-swearing at each other. Why, there ain't a man living who could live with that woman. Just one of them nagging women, yi-yi-yi-ing at you all the time. 'Bout a month ago I brings home with me a couple of friends, five or six of them, to drink a little home-brew and play some poker. And do you know what that woman done? She run them off; yeh, that's what she done; she run them off 'bout three o'clock in the morning. Never heard the like of it before in all my life. And when we went to them dances that different folks give round the neighborhood, she'd come up to me and say, 'Bud, why don't you dance with Mrs. Deshazer?' Or Mrs. Sims— all them old hags that was her friends. But the women that interest me— no, no, sir, she wouldn't want me to talk to them or dance with them. Jealous? Why, that woman wouldn't let me leave the dance floor even if I'd been a-drinking home-brew all evening.

" 'But I don't say nothing. I never said nothing to all her nagging and jealous fits. I just keeps my mind and tries to get along with her the best I could. Yes, sir, I took a man-size job on myself when I tried to get along with that old woman. I thought 'bout running her off a time or two; then I'd get feeling kinda sorry for her, 'cause she was getting too ugly and mean to land another poor old man.'

" 'Did you ever try beating her?'

" 'I ain't one to hit a woman with my fist; no, sir, nobody can say Bud Atterbury hit his old woman with his fist. I did try using a club, but she took it away from me.'

" 'How come you killed her?'

" 'Wahl, one night I goes on a big drunk—what I mean I got fairly drunk—and when I come home I had one good drink left in the jar. I was a-saving it for the morning. And by God, that woman, that soulless woman, poured that one drink I was a-saving for an eye-opener out the window. Yes, sir, poured that drink out. Was I mad? Christ! I went plomb mad. Who wouldn't, when a crazy woman pours out that one drink you was a-saving for the morning after? I was so mad I killed her. Just don't remember how I done it, but I killed that nagging old woman. Yes, sir, and I'd do it again; you're damn right I would—pouring out a man's drink he was a-saving for the morning after. Sure I killed her. Wouldn't you?'

" 'Justifiable homicide,' says Lawyer Jim, and then he starts his pleading for Bud. Mister, there ain't nothing like it when Lawyer Jim starts his pleading. He bellows, he cries like a baby, he swears, and such carryings-on and waving of his hands—it's something! That's what I like 'bout them trials, Lawyer Jim a-pleading his case. When he finishes with his pleading the jury goes out and brings in the verdict, 'Not guilty!' "

"Tell me some more 'bout Lawyer Jim."

"I'm in a hurry. I've got to meet them boys out by Ignorant Hill."

"Why did Borger Reds kill his wife?"

"Hell! He catches her kicking his bird dog. I'll tell you 'bout it some other time."

"If I killed my old woman, could I get to go on them fishing parties?"

"I ain't sure."

"Do you think it would help me any?"

"Yeh, it would be a big help to you. See you some more."

THE DEATH OF TOM MIX

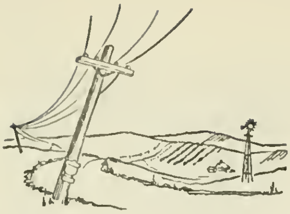
E. S. Forgotson

Watch him again, leaping a roof-tree, dropping over a cliff—
The man who knew how to conquer the *if*—
Galloping across that fabulous land,
A pointed six-shooter in either hand.

With a well-known smile
He shot out buttons at a mile.
There were those who wanted to resist him,
But in the end the lady kissed him.

I can see we were boys; too young to try
That bold man to identify.
The square shone bright, the rows were dim,
But our eyes were not really on him.

I really mean History—it's History I blame
That we could not know that well-known name
Gone now for good into that smother
Where we can't tell one from the other.



Fern Seed--For Peace

Ruth Bass

HIGH-JOHN-THE-CONQUEROR! Rattlesnake-master! Asthma-root! Devil's-shoestring! Sampson-snakeroot! Shame-weed! Their very names are magic and conjure back the fragrance of childhood's summers, even though they might be dispossessed of their spirit, the essence of the herb that healed. Where Old Con acquired her knowledge nobody knew. Perhaps not simply her own life but the lives of her forefathers had given their share to her appalling amount of plant lore. Perhaps she belonged, as she always maintained, to the same world as the swamp with its cypresses, its bayous, its birds, and its scents of sweet bay, candleberry, and witch-wood; so intelligence drew on the same source as nature. She presumed always that the spirit which quickened her own nimble body was of the same essence which animates all living things.

"Effen a pusson onderstan's," she used to say, "an' loves, den all thangs be's dey pardners in seekin' atter wisdom. Cose yo bound tuh drink plenty tea biled outen high-John-de-conque'er an' prince-feather roots—and totin' a buckeye he'ps."

When one has come to the end of a wondering period, after weighing and comparing and expounding many things, he returns at last to very simple memories. This one read Descartes and Hegel and Heraclitus in his hunger. That one analyzed his mind and studied his heart. Old Con measured her life by a certain gaunt, moss-hung cypress and a cardinal flower that burned beside a sluggish bayou. Looking at all, I have no assurance, but half believe that the pale Cape Jessamine growing from her dust must scent the evening air under the cedars because she lived intimately with simple things, jessamine and their kind.

"Con know, honey. Mammy know." Old Con pulled up and began fumbling in the voluminous pockets of her pettiskirt. Her glass beads rattled. She brought forth at last a little red flannel pillow about two inches square.

"Put dis under yo pillah, Hon. Hit's stuffed wid cattail fuzz an' blood-o'-Jesus leaves. Wid roses an' lavendah foh sweetness, an' fern seed foh peace. Sleep wid hit, baby. Hit'll bring yo' peace an' safety." She blew out the candle and stood stroking a little girl's hair with her warm, old hand, while moonlight white as silver lay across the bed and a mockingbird sang from the magnolia tree. She had told a particularly frightful tale, and neither caresses nor the old songs could take the fear from her wide-eyed little girl's mind. The faint odor of her coffee hung on the warm air, for Con always enjoyed this refreshment after her chillun were in bed, before she went home for the night. Doubtless this was a precaution against the hants that stalked her and her flickering, pitch-pine torch across the fields.

Gradually the scent of lavender and fern seed took possession of the child, and Con's old voice bound them closer. "Hit'll bring yo' peace. Hit'll dribe off hants and witches. De good Lo'd done pervided a plant er root foh every kind ob ailment, whedder ob de body er de sperrit. Us be de las' comers on dis arth . . . us jes find what allus been heah . . . fern seed, hit foh peace. . . ." Too peaceful and contented and sleepy to listen, the child drifted into a curious, lovely, and magic serenity. Too sleepy to listen then, today like wondering children we long to travel again the road which life has traveled before us. How natural and comforting that it should be so—scented with lavender and fern seed!

II

The Bayou Pierre swamps are tall and wide and wondrous. Those who are born near to its dark cloisters know that it is a black world, a strange world, and sometimes a fearful world. It is the Negro's own world, holding his blessed secrets, his simple loves, his comforting philosophies. The ways of life the swamp people lead are as wise and as good as ours, and far more strange. In the Bottoms the Negroes have builded a society, a philosophy, a science, and an art which belong to the swamp and enable them to live there. Their hearts and minds are attuned to the changing moods of the forest. Living near the swamp's silent loveliness has made them come to know that merely to be is perhaps a greater thing than to achieve, to live in peace and quiet joy is better than to whirl along on the restless tides of progress.

A quiet, wide-eyed white child once had the good fortune to be taken with Old Con, the herb woman, to gather up and follow to the end some of the fraying threads of swamp science and art . . . and today jack-in-the-pulpit, angel's-root, and devil's-shoestring come home to me in a way that speculative knowledge cannot. Laggard in sleep that I was, how many mornings I have waked to hear her voice calling that sky-after-rain bloomed blue in the fields and that under giant swamp trees the pale ghost-flower hung its shameful head.

Perhaps my family did not think it fortunate that I had an herb-woman for my nurse, when I insisted on carrying a ball of garlic in my apron pocket to ward off the evil eye, or when I wore the evil-smelling Jimson-weed leaves to church in the crown of my new hat to prevent overheating; but the memory of such summers is green and blue and crimson. The swamp was Old Con's cotton field, to gather when and where she found it growing; and as the spirit of the cotton field is friendly to the hard-working, intelligent farmer, so the swamp that retires into itself when man goes into it rewarded Con for her patient work. As she studied over the plants at great length, testing the leaves by holding them to the light, by rubbing and smelling and tasting them, her silence always increased the mystery that hung about her. Awed by the whisper of great trees, I never questioned. I simply followed, crushing and smelling and tasting after her.

Fortune's favorites may well envy that happiness that came to a child who followed Con over the fields where the butterfly bush burned the water rows, and the blue-eyed grass, "blue-star, dat little sistah ob de blue queen flag," lit the low meadows. Where the brown thrashers sang "Drop it! Drop it! Cover it up! Cover it up! Pull it up! Pull it up!" and the cotton fields bloomed red and white. We crossed the branch and went on past Con's cabin where it nestled alongside the swamp, with the swamp's shadow always upon it like an adumbration of the brooding, dangerous, and lovely mystery of the swamp. In the cabin yard the prince-feathers were just showing their royal crimson velvet and the vervain bloomed. In the garden patch the dew-silvered collard leaves sparkled in the sun and the sage and rosemary and mint scented the air to heaven. Then into the swamp itself, where the moss-draped trees were alive with little greenish-yellow things that Con assured me were only pretending to be birds. I was not fooled by them and I am not today, though they have fooled all ornithologists into believing they are warblers. The spicy odor of mingled scents of dew, bay blossoms, and swamp pine that the swamp offered, I recommend to those who are tired of sandalwood and attar of roses.

I would stand silent while Con dug the bulbous root of the showy orchids that bloomed elfin-like where the tall trees gathered. I knew that she prepared these roots into a highly nourishing food for sickly children and that boiled into tea they prevent nightmares and bad dreams, the same as mistletoe would. I tried to keep up with her quick steps through the rank witchweed and mayapple, while the morning sun slipped through the leaves of the tulip trees and water-oaks and swamp pines and, farther on, the ghostly, moss-hung cypresses. I heard a wood thrush sing, and far off a mourning dove mourned. I saw the great pileated woodpecker, "cock of the swamp," and heard him hack on a dead pine. I knew that he was a conjure bird and dug out all the secrets of the trees. I knew the sweetness of blooming hay . . . then suddenly Con stopped and sniffed, her flat nostrils dilated as she stood looking through the trees at the immense green of things. She left me and made directly for some clumps of rank-growing weed that bore compound, lance-shaped leaves. She broke a leaf from this plant and very carefully measured the shriveled, rusty, middle finger of her left hand with it. She tore off the bit of leaf that reached beyond her finger tip, rolled the remainder of the leaf carefully, and put it in her pocket. Then I went to her and she measured the middle finger of my little, left hand, tore off the end of the leaf, rolled it up carefully, and put it in my pocket.

"Now yo' kin walk proudful, honey. Dat de ten-finger plant an' hit'll give yo' control over peoples. . . ." Con was striding on and I followed, my hand on the roll of sharp-scented green leaf in my apron pocket and my head full of visions about the high-handed way I would control the folks at home. Later I grew drunk with the scent of blooming candleberry and the wondrous knowledge of how its berries boiled down would produce wax to straighten hair and whose roots boiled in tea would cure headache. It must have been while my eager hands gathered these fragrant blossoms that the ten-finger fell out of my pocket and I lost, once and for all, my power to control people.

III

There is a plant provided for every kind of ailment; we simply have to find what has always existed for us, Old Con used to say. And she had found a use for every plant that grew in the swamp, the fields, or about people's houses.

The king root of all the forest is high-John-the-conqueror. It will ward off any disease that has been brought on by conjure, and all witches quake when they see a bit of it in a person's hand. This magic plant is the marsh St. John's-wort, a member of the same family which in Europe has been credited with the power of preserving people against lightning. In the swamps of the South the Negroes fear to tread on this plant lest they be seized and borne away by hants. It is commonly placed under doorsteps to prevent the nightly visitations of ghosts, witches, and nightmares. It is a cure-all for any kind of wounds, and the dew that gathers upon its leaves is excellent for strengthening the eyesight.

Sampson-snakeroot, a member of the pea family whose flower is of a purplish color and whose long, tough root is a "rattlesnake-master," holds a place in the swamp Negro's affections next to tobacco and coffee. Its roots are boiled into a powerful and invigorating tonic, and they drink it by the jugfuls. It is a sure cure for cramping and for loss of manhood. Chewing this root and spitting its juice at a person's feet will give the chewer control over that person. Always chew some Sampson-snakeroot while trading and you will get the best of the bargain. It will make a person brave, proudful, and mannish. Even chewing leaves of the plant in the presence of any one will give you a measure of control of the person. Carrying a bit of the root in one's pocket will prevent snakes from biting you.

Devil's-shoestring, a species of cross vine that bears bright-colored, trumpet-shaped flowers, is a powerful plant that is often used in making "tricks" by conjurers. Chewed and rubbed on the hands, it will give a man control over a woman. This is also useful in drawing a good gambling hand. Plant-of-peace, a fairylike little orchis that grows profusely in the swamp, is boiled into tea and consumed in great quantities as a protection against enemies. It also brings sweet dreams to the drinker. Besides these one finds the swamp Negro using shame-weed, or sensitive-plant, to make evildoers ashamed and willing to give up their wicked ways. He chews heart-leaves to soften the hearts of those whom he desires to win. Toadstools wet with camphor will ward off conjuration. Mistletoe hung over the door will keep out conjurers. Queer little figures carved from the wood of mistletoe are often found on the mantel shelves over the fireplaces or hung on the heads of beds. These and many other forest plants, Con knew and used. But not these alone; the flowers and weeds that are cultivated or discouraged about the cabins—each has some special purpose for the Negro who knows how to use it.

Blue vervain, a purplish-blue member of the verbena family, is the one flower found around the doorstep of every cabin in the Bottoms. It is planted there to attract lovers. Vervain is sometimes called herb-of-the-cross because it is said to have grown on Mount Calvary and therefore possesses every sort of miraculous power. It has great value as a love potion. It is used as a bridal token. It "hinders witches from dey will." The cultivated verbena possesses the same powers. . . .

Prince's-feather, a tall plant with queer, deep-crimson plush flowers, is found in every yard, not only for decorative purposes but because of its efficacy in laying tricks and warding off conjuration. Mustard seed planted under the doorsteps will keep out ghosts and witches. Sprinkling collard seed around the bed will drive off bad dreams and nightmares. Red pepper, red onions, and "palma-Christian" are always found growing in the garden patches near the cabins. Red pepper is an effective charm against hoodoo. It is worn in the shoes, hung over the door, and strung across the smoky rafters inside the houses. It is used to cure chills and fevers. Red pepper is most powerful if planted by a mad person or an idiot. The woman who desires never to have a child mixes red pepper and gunpowder in tea of the red-shanks root. She puts this in a bottle and sets it away for nine days. She drinks a little of this every time the moon changes and remains childless. Red onion carried in the left hand in the presence of a conjurer will prevent him from conjuring a person. Red-onion juice mixed with the tracks of a woman's left foot, then tied in red flannel and worn in the left-breast pocket, will call a woman you desire to you. On the whole, red onions are lucky to have in the house. Added to the diet in generous quantities, they produce health and strength. Garlic is also effective in preventing conjuration. A bit of he-garlic carried in the pocket will ward off the evil eye and bring good luck generally.

Con also taught me that wrapping in leaves of "palma-Christian," or castor-oil plant, will not only cure chills and fever but as poultices the leaves will relieve headache and "heatin'-spells." Waving chinaberry leaves at them will drive off unwanted animals and insects, such as stray dogs, goats, flies, or mosquitoes. But never wave a chinaberry limb at a stray cat! Even the rank-growing, evil-smelling weeds about the cabin lots all have some power.

The Jimson weed with its white and pale lavender blooms is able to tell the time of day. Precisely at four o'clock in the afternoon these bell-like blossoms open up and give out their sickening, too-sweet odor to attract the great sphinx moth that hovers over them, seemingly suspended by magic, so fast is the flutter of its wings. The Jimson weed never miscalculates and opens sooner than four o'clock for fear the bees might call and gather its narcotic-like nectar to mix with their honey. Jimson-weed leaves pounded with the dried head of a snake is a powerful poison that, used in a trick, will bring blindness and even death upon the victim. Jimson-weed root, pounded with fresh pokeberry root, made into tea, and swallowed on the first night of the new moon, will prevent conjure during that moon. Dried Jimson-weed leaves smoked in cigarettes will cure asthma. Blood-o'-Jesus, a common weed whose coarse, dark-red leaves cover the lots and farmyards, is a useful plant. Mix its roots with sugar, spice, and bluestone, and wrap (always wrapping toward you) in red flannel and carry it about. It will bring you peace and safety. Bowels-of-Christ, a kind of green salvia whose leaves turn red around the edge, is stewed in lard to make an excellent salve.

Old Con also taught me that certain trees are taboo. The black folk of the Bayou Pierre Bottoms never burn wood that pops loudly when burning. Sassafras wood pops and will cause the death of someone present when it is burned. They never burn wood of a tree that was struck by lightning. They never plant a cedar tree except in a cemetery. Plant a cedar tree in your yard, and someone you love will die as soon as the tree has grown large enough to shade a grave. They never burn cobs of seed corn, or the hulls of seed beans or peas, lest the sun burn up that crop. Hulls must be thrown into the road, and corncobs must rot in the field. If you scatter peanut hulls around your door, it means that you will soon go to jail. Trees that rub together in the wind and make a creaking sound are looked upon with suspicion. Dogs and cats can see spirits; so they avoid such trees. The bark of these trees steeped in rain water and made into a sort of wine is used by conjurers to make them strong in the head. The dogwood tree is a symbol of immortality because its buds for next year's bloom appear before the leaves fall off in autumn. Dogwood root tea made from roots "dug crosswise uv de worl'" is a common bitter drink of all swamp women. Christ was hung on a cottonwood tree; that's why it trembles so. Judas was hung on the redbud tree. Swamp Negroes are afraid to pass a blooming Judas or redbud tree at night. The swamp maple whose beautiful crimson flowers light the swamps in February and whose small leaves are pale underneath is believed by the swamp folk to have the power, in some mysterious way, to turn white before a storm.

IV

Perhaps a few Southern children still tag at the heels of Negro servants from nursery to kitchen, from kitchen to cabin and field and swamp, where high-John-the-conqueror rules and sweet bay and candleberry and a hundred other herbs of magic sweetness offer fragrant balm for many a heartache. Theirs is an experience that sages may well envy. To them nature will always be a harvest that can be gathered when and where they find it growing. It is an opportunity that will vanish before many years. Educational and mechanical sciences are encroaching upon this swamp and field lore. Already the more sophisticated Negroes despise this crude yet natural magic of tree and flower. Old Con is gone, and not one of her own children or grandchildren has claimed the legacy of her plant knowledge. Only in the heart of her big-eyed, solemn white-baby does fern seed still bring peace and vervain kindle love. Though Old Con's flickering, pitch-pine torch has gone out and the ghostly plat-eyes wander aimlessly over the lowland, lonely and forsaken, the spirit of the swamp is still friendly to those who care for its knowledge. In its dim, sweet places where the yellow jasmine tosses its blossoms in showers of gold the human heart, whether white or black, can steal away to God.

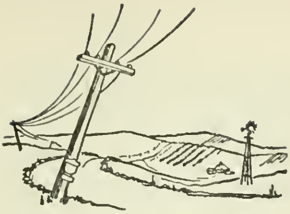
A long-legged, thirteen-year-old girl was privileged to stand on the hill to the north, under the cedars and Cape jessamines, at the burying they gave Con. Of prayer and Bible reading there was none. There was no sermon. Instead the Negro preacher lifted his powerful voice and sang a couplet in praise of old Con. In a long strophe the sound went winging across the generation of dark sleepers as sweetly and as spontaneously as the redbird's whistle from the cedars, or the mockingbird's song from the bridal wreath. From the crowd a woman's voice took up the story. One by one her friends wove for Con a wreath of song. Most likely no one present could ever recall a line of it afterwards, but to a listening child the "Spiritual" seemed to float across a dark and cloistered bayou to plead for a simple, erudite, kindly old soul.

In the South the Negroes keep the practice of bringing to a person's grave some of the things that had been precious to the living—cups, vases, china bowls, lamps (to light the soul to glory). To the graves of children they bring little china-doll heads and toy animals. The earth above Old Con was covered with the flowers she had known and loved so well. Wild sweet honeysuckle, crimson flowers of the maple, pale lavender and pink sweet williams, and white, withering dogwood. A brown thrasher called from a blooming briar thicket, "Drop it! Drop it! Cover it up! Cover it up!" His song is lost in the voices of men and women:

"Who'll be a-livin'
    When Ah'm daid?
Trees'll be a-livin' an' a-wavin'
    When Ah'm daid!
Birds'll be a-livin' an' a-singin'
    When Ah'm daid—
Roses'll be a-livin' an' a-bloomin'
    When Ah'm daid!"

It goes on until the thirteen-year-old feels utterly extinguished—less than the grass, less than the vervain, less than the fern leaves she has dropped among the dogwood.

But suddenly the song restores her spirit with a great shout—"Who'll be a-livin' when Ah'm daid? Ah will! Ah will!" It is Old Con rubbing and smelling and tasting leaves of flowers in Paradise, while a wide-eyed cherub tags along wondering why she gathers the fern seed.



The Beast

Katharine Shattuck

SHE had been wakened at dawn by the pounding.

She sat up in bed and saw that the child in the next room was also sitting up, listening.

"What is that noise?" she cried and sank down, but the woman continued listening.

The horse hoofs had sounded on the stable floor all the previous evening in uneasy tread, but this was different—louder and more hollow and intermittent.

Light lay in the room in grey drifts, which feathered off, as she stared at them, into the scarcely discernible outline of chest, mantel, wall. The windows blurred greyer and greyer, but the pounding was insistent and at last she crept from the bed, leaving her husband asleep beneath the sheet.

So as not to disturb the child she went through the hall and unlocked the front screen, which was the only door they used in summer. At sight of the locked door she thought as she did every morning that locking yourself in was stupid since blackness seeped in through crack and keyhole, screen, shutter, and glass.

On the lawn in the mist the trees like smoke blew up. The whole visible world streamed in greyness, unfamiliar, though she saw it each morning, for she was a light sleeper and rose almost always at dawn.

The horse was in the stall her husband had made for him at the rear of the house. At one time, they had discovered, it had been a large and commodious outdoor toilet and housed the cesspool from the house as well, so that the floor was hollow, built over an excavation sixteen feet deep.

The night before, it had seemed so right to have the horse looking out over the swinging doors into the yard, the long face with its white blaze and the unspeaking intelligence. She was afraid of horses as of all animals; yet they seemed chained and sad to her, unspeakably sad like the enchantments laid on princes in the fairy tales. Poor beast, poor horse, and prince or horse to be feared. Shuddering, she crossed herself, like a child exorcising evil.

She walked on the grass in her white gown and bare feet past the two lilac trees, which crumpled grey south of the house.

At the southwest corner of the house she stopped. She held the hard realness of the stone wall in her hand, as if it were talisman against the danger, unknown and impalpable, a hollow sound of pounding, a non-human, non-animal groaning, that lurked in the shadow across the lawn and beneath the row of elm trees rising beyond the stable.

Birds were waking. Roosters crowed on every farm along the valley. The cheering daylight sound did not disperse the shadow here on the hill, or interrupt the pounding, which must have come from the stable, although she could not definitely locate it, or would not, feeling the urgency of her husband's displeasure if she were unable to tell him she had crossed the yard, unbolted the stable doors, removed the iron rod, and, flinging wide the doors, perceived in all its terror or pity or blackness whatever it was making the sound. He expected so much of her, demanding that she be upright and gay, young and old, all things in one; and she was not equal to being these things.

The doors banged out as if with bursting, and she caught one glimpse of the horse's head rearing; enough to tell her the trouble lay in the stable.

She ran back to the house, crouching in a white bundle on the steps of the porch. Her white face stared over the valley, which disappeared completely in the mist as the sun rose and the trees on the hill became solidly trees, green, blowing a little in the morning breeze, filled with the hidden, raucous cry of birds.

The pounding in the back yard continued.

It became, now it was daylight, the sound of a horse banging against the stable door. In trouble, she thought with sudden compassion and ran into the room where her husband lay, to wake him.

He came out of sleep slowly and sat up, seeing her before him as in a dream—colorless hair, pale face, startling great eyes.

"The horse!" she cried. "Something's happening to the horse."

Still in the envelope of sleep he stumbled into his shoes, tangling the laces until he gave up tying them. He pulled his trousers on and went swiftly through the house past the child, who was rousing now and crying "Maggie" for her mother.

It was a clear day. The mist was going in the valley. The hard outline of tree, building, shadow was sharp in the sun.

He ran to the stable and unbolting the doors saw what he already knew had happened, what he had known would happen. When he had first planned to put the horse in a stable at the house, Karl, the Bohemian farmer in the valley, had said, "You put your horse there she break through. The floor he won't hold her. I tell you." But he had gone ahead with his plans. He had been so eager to have the horse where he could ride him every day, where Maggie and the child could ride. But Maggie would be afraid. Unadmitted, it had been another test, another, perhaps the last grasping after the other days when Maggie was not afraid. Impalpable, untouchable, the past was going, going. All this he thought as he unbolted the doors and flung them wide.

With the doors open, the horse lay in the entry.

His body was wet, trembling, dark, his neck outstretched.

"Ginger!" The man knelt beside him.

In one glance he saw what had happened. A rotting plank, worked loose by the animal's tread, had tipped up with his weight. The right rear leg had plunged through the flooring near the wall, dangling clear to the groin in the hollow room beneath. The animal, struggling to stand on his forefeet, pawing the floor, chest and head rearing, struck in vain against the nothingness beneath, struggling. The great eyes strained as if with speech. Sweat streamed on his coat.

"Ginger!" the man cried. He brought him water, petted him. The quivering, terrified animal for one moment lay quiet, and then the forefeet began again the horrible pounding in their struggle to stand, as if the horse, dismembered, were struggling to walk. The hideous inarticulate animal cry sounded again.

The man stopped at the house to answer his wife when she called to him. The child was in her arms. Her long hair streamed over them both.

"I'll have to get Karl. He told me it would happen. We may have to get the rendering-plant truck. They've got a hoist.

"I don't know. I feel terrible. It's my fault. I should have known."

He was young, almost boyish, almost innocent in his eagerness to make his living real, naïve in his believing.

He sped down the hill in his car.

The summer sun, high in freshness, had dried the dew. The outer trees on the knoll beyond the drive were sharply delineated as trees, but within they stood in black and deep shadow. The cows came up past them in a long blond row.

"Karl's milked," he thought matter-of-factly against the strange skein of the day.

Nights now were so bad that any daylight, however filled with danger, was to be desired. To keep day and night separate—that was the thing—clearly marked in divisibility; the one matter-of-fact, safe, ordinary, peaceful, dull even; the other filled with Maggie's crying. The line between light and darkness was sudden. Something indefinable happened. Not a line in geography to be crossed or perceived, it was the same air, the same place, but different.

She had been gay always, the happiest creature he had ever known, the freest. He had counted on her the most, been surest of her. And now, silently, efficiently, she did her daylight tasks in greyness, crying at night. Scene after scene filled his eyes, and now as if some demand too great were being made of her, she was changing under his eyes. He did not understand.

He stopped the car and opened the grey latticework gate to the farm and drove the car through. On either side were flowered banks of daisies, larkspur, horsemint.

Chickens were pecking in the road and fluttering ahead of him, squawking.

The dogs at the farmhouse barked, and the farmer came out, chewing the last cud of his breakfast.

"Gee Christ whiz!" he said and wiped his mouth with his hand.

He jumped into the car.

"That horse he'll kill himself," he said. "You get a son beetch hurry."

In the yard again he took charge.

Maggie, in her white gown, still holding the child, whom she had dressed, however, cowered in the background beyond the grass-grown cistern head.

Karl, short, lively, wiry, dark, with coarse, leathered skin and a back that had lifted a loaded wagon sunk to its hubs in mud, fluttered around the horse like an angry fly. The animal worn by his frantic and unavailing struggle lay now with stretched neck on the stable floor, steaming sweat, its stench rising in a vapor around him. He was a chestnut, large for a saddle horse, with a handsome beautifully blazed face.

"He'll kill himself." Karl twisted the horse's tail and heaved against the flank, but one man's strength was no match for a horse's weight.

They tore the flooring loose, and, lowering a ladder into the pit beneath the room, they descended into the ammonic stink below to watch the action of the horse's leg in its fight against the vague, the untouchable blackness beneath. Karl, unconvinced that brute force was not the answer, pushed against the hoof; and the horse, with the fearful reaching of the dying after air, struggled to stand, hoofs pounding, head straining, eyes starting.

The futile pounding forelegs gave up and he sank down.

The men scratched their heads, cursed, and tried new tactics. A block and tackle was like a child's idea. They tied a rope around the horse's belly and pulled at the forelegs as if to saw them off, so that the dismembered quarters could then be lifted out at will and be disposed of. The watching woman saw it and with a scream protested. Karl in one of his lightning leaps disappeared to the barn and returned with a huge drag chain, which they fastened to the bumper of the car and to the rope around the horse's middle. Then the man, maneuvering against his will, put the engine into low, reversed, pulled in low again—gasoline engine against horse, a cruelty the woman could not endure and she screamed again. The straining, beseeching face of the animal wavered behind the blowing fumes of gasoline.

With five attempts they succeeded in dragging him half over the threshold. But at the moment the hindquarters came free, the foreleg went down into the hole, the momentarily released weight of the board giving like a child's teeter-totter. And then the horse gave up.

"She's a no go." Karl wiped the sweat from his face with the back of his hand and stood panting with the exertion of pushing at the horse. "She's a no go."

"I'll get some more men."

He jumped into the car and disappeared down the hill.

People were going to early mass in the valley. A common Sunday quiet lay on the air. At the foot of the hill he had to wait for a car to pass. People waved to him. He did not recognize them, did not respond. The thing—whatever it was—that was happening on the hill encased him in its shadow. On the edge of it stood Maggie, holding the child. He had not had time, he had not had the heart to go to her and with his arm about her suggest that she dress, leading her toward the house. She with the submissiveness that was so new in her, so frightening, would have gone, would have returned neatly dressed in a shirtwaist and skirt, her hair twisted in its knot behind—a woman and a stranger to him. Only in bed now did he know her. He could not define the change in her, could not discern its meaning. He rubbed the shadow away from his eyes and concentrated on the horse, the men he was to get, this actual thing that was to be done.

He crossed the bridge.

The river, dark brown where it did not reflect the banks, moved on its sluggish inevitable way to the Mississippi. They had spent hours on the river together, swimming beside their canoe, lying on the cushions, watching the green, closed world slide past. Now she was afraid of water and would not go, hating it with a violence out of all proportion to the fear even. He saw the small white face, the glittering eyes, the beating fists: "I will not go, I will not go." Her anger was not against him, he thought. It was some life sickness he could not grasp.

He turned to the left and stopped in the yard of a farmhouse on the edge of the town.

Slim Drummond stood beside his black car in the yard, paring his fingernails. He was dressed in black for church, but turned over the car keys to his eldest daughter when he heard of the accident, and came out in five minutes dressed in blue jeans and shirt. A wide-brimmed Stetson hat, old and greasy, was pushed back on his head. He was tall and as slim as a boy, but with an old man's face and powerful hands.

"Call Jim Roberts," he said. "Tell him to bring his hired man. A horse'll kill himself."

They went up the hill. Karl was working over the horse, which lay exhausted on the floor, in resignation worse than struggle. Karl's broad Bohemian face with its creased leather hide and black eyes recognized Slim's presence, but he did not speak.

The child was running in the yard, pattering, picking flowers, and the man picked her up and handed her to her mother, patting her arm and looking at her gravely.

"I think you'd better go inside, Maggie," he said.

Taking the child's hand, she moved toward the house.

Whatever it was happening to the horse in the yard held her and she stopped by the house, identified with the struggle as if the horse by getting free would free her too from terror, this loneness she had stood in since she first knew two people could come no nearer than touch. It wasn't the work; it wasn't the fears even or that living was harder than she had thought. It was that you did it alone.

The men stood over the horse, silently appraising the work to be done.

A car roared on the hill, and Jim Roberts came around the house—a big man, thick of chest and strong, with a good-natured face. He pushed his hat back and scratched his head.

There was a moment of disagreement; Karl favored the block and tackle. But suddenly co-ordinated, as if the work to be done determined the method, making the many one, they took their places: the man at the head, tugging on the halter; Karl at the shoulder pushing; the other two at the tail, lifting it like a handle.

The great neck lay stretched on the threshold, trembling.

Woman and horse, one, waited an indefinable moment when, lifted in terror, they were not yet free.

In rhythm, in silence, and with tremendous effort, the men heaved the horse out of the stall. Sliding free of the stable, the four legs lay stretched on solid ground, the head lay on the grass. The huge body was motionless, hardly a horse, as if by death disenchanted. Blood like sweat streaked the quivering groin.

"She's a beesiness," Karl panted, squinting at the underside of the horse, his hands on his knees. "He's a big. Get him up. Let him piss. He's a swelled."

The four men stood over the body, breathing. Karl pranced like a matador or an insect. "Get him up. She's a—"

"Let him lie a minute. Let him get his breath. Ginger. So, boy." The man rubbed the muzzle, and picking some clover gave it to the horse.

The men slapped and beat at the horse, calling the threats men use against animals in command; and at last the horse stood, wavering on its slender legs, crumpling, then solid. Nothing was broken then. The man gave him water to drink.

The woman came along the grass, leading the child by the hand, walking in her white nightgown, her bare feet showing beneath. Her hair covering her shoulders, hung to her waist. The sun as if caught shone in it. The delicately-boned face and great eyes were uplifted; the face was strange. Unhesitating, without fear, she came up to the horse and taking the head in her arms rubbed the muzzle with her face. The man, warmed in gratitude, put his arm on her shoulders.

"Poor Ginger," he said, feeling Maggie's hair against his face. His eyes stung. Everything was all right, he thought. Everything was going to be all right. He had been imagining fears. The horse's predicament had made him foolish.

She looked into the horse's face and said, "Poor horse, poor beast," and kissed it, rubbing the blaze with her cheek.

Karl seized the halter and led the horse up and down the yard. The legs were stiff. Blood, bright red, showed on the groin where the animal had been cruelly sawed as he had hung.

The woman, leaving the child, went back to the house.

Now the exertion was over, the return to commonness seemed a little silly. They pushed their hats back, wiped their faces. The man took a cigarette and handed the others each one.

"He's a beesiness," he said and they laughed in relief.

Smoke uptrailed in silly morning incense. A chicken was crowing. It was still morning, the same world. The floor of the stable was shattered and splintered, the grass on the threshold was pounded, hair from the horse's tail lay on the floor, but other sign of disaster there was none, he thought. Shadows lay in their accustomed order. On the clothesline at the edge of the yard a child's bib was blowing.

Karl led the horse down the hill to the barn.

Slim Drummond and Jim Roberts muttered that they must be getting on.

The man caught up the child in his arms. He watched them drive away, the black Chrysler car shining in the sun in unmeaningful daylight reality.

The child patted his chin and said: "Your horse will be all right, Daddy. I think your horse will be all right."

A wren flew away from the cistern. The doors in the empty stall were open, banging a little in the wind.

The child in his arms was saying: "Your horse will be all right."

They went into the house.

She was sitting by the table in the kitchen.

He put his hand on her shoulder. "Are you all right, Maggie?" She had knotted her hair behind and put on a blouse and skirt. "Are you all right?"

Table and counters in the kitchen were scrubbed white. There were no shadows in the room. In the neat whiteness of stove, icebox, walls there were no shadows.

"Are you all right?"

She turned. He saw the line of the cheeks he had loved for their roundness, the white plane of forehead beneath the hair.

"I'm all right," she said. She touched his hand with her face, giving him the talisman he wanted, knowing its worth.

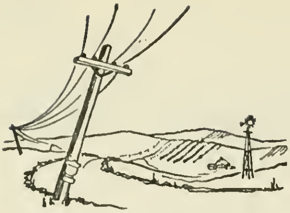
THE LAST CORN SHOCK

Glenn Ward Dresbach

I remember how we stood
In the field, while far away
Blue hazes drifted on from hill to hill
And curled like smoke from many a sunset wood,
And the loaded wagon creaked while standing still . . .
I heard my father say,
"The last corn shock can stay."

We had seen a pheasant there
In the sun; he went inside
As if he claimed the shock, as if he meant
To show us, with the field so nearly bare,
We had no right to take his rustic tent.
And so we circled wide
For home, and let him hide.

The first wild ducks flashed by
Where the pasture brook could hold
The sunset at the curve, and drifting floss
Escaped the wind and clung. The shocks were dry
And rustled on the wagon. Far across
The field, against the cold,
The last shock turned to gold.



The Funeral

William March

WHEN her little niece died, Mrs. Kirby went at once to her brother's house on Madison Street and took charge of things. She had made all the arrangements for the funeral herself; she had even selected the small, satin casket, and she stood, now, receiving late floral offerings and greeting the friends who came to offer their sympathy.

"It's very sad," she kept saying. "I can't believe it, even yet. Only a week ago and she was as well and strong as you or I. She took sick two days after her seventh birthday."

The bell rang again and she turned from her friends and opened the front door. It was then that she saw Reba, the cook's little girl. Reba stood beside the fence, a look of amazement on her scarred, black face. Her nappy hair had been plaited by her mother and tied with thread the Sunday before, but the thread was coming loose and the plaits, unraveled a little now, stood up on her skull like tiny lengths of frayed, black hemp. She was wearing a faded, print dress which the dead child had outgrown; but the dress was too small for Reba, as well, and beneath it her bare legs and a stretch of her lathlike, black thighs were visible.

Mrs. Kirby opened her mouth, as if to speak to the child, but she did not. She merely took the wreath from the delivery boy and went into the parlor where the coffin was. She put the flowers down, and when she came back to the hall, she saw that other friends had come. The new arrivals went at once and stood above the small white casket. They were early, and after whispering together, they seated themselves at the far end of the room and waited for the funeral service to begin.

Mrs. Kirby came onto the porch once more, stopping beside the cypress vines. "Reba," she said, "you can't stand out here staring at people. Go play in the back yard."

"Yassum," said Reba. "Yassum." She moved from the fence regretfully, looking back over her shoulder. At that moment the florist's wagon turned the corner and stopped again, and the delivery boy came up the walk with another design. It was from the schoolchildren of the little girl's class this time. The design was almost as tall as Reba herself, and it showed two gates swinging outward, gates made of dampened moss into which flowers had been stuck. Above the opening gates, and supported by a rod, there floated a stuffed, white dove with outspread wings.

"Reba," said Mrs. Kirby patiently. "Reba, don't you hear me talking to you? Go back to the kitchen and stay with your mother."

Reba looked at her imploringly. "Yassum," she said meekly. "Yassum." But it was not possible for her to move from the fence. She turned her neck and her black, bullet-shaped head slowly, following the floral offering up the steps with her eyes and sighing when the door shut away its magnificence. Mrs. Kirby started to speak again, but changed her mind. She went to the kitchen where Cora, the cook, bent over her sink, was scrubbing pots.

"You must tell your little girl to stay away from the fence," she said. "She's standing there staring at everybody who comes in. I've told her to go away, but she won't mind me."

Cora looked up and wiped her lips on her sleeve. "Reba ain't got good sense," she said reproachfully. "You knows that. You knows Reba never did have good sense." She turned ponderously and reached for the thick switch that lay on the shelf above the wood-box. She went into the side yard and stood half-screened by shrubbery. "Come away from that fence, gal!" she whispered fiercely. "Come away from that fence befo' I put another knot on your haid!"

"Yassum," said Reba meekly. "Yassum."

She backed warily away from her mother, making a wide half-circle, but when the clump of cypress trees and small crêpe-myrtles was between them, she turned and ran, throwing her legs out.

"Let me ketch you by that fence agin," said Cora. "Jes' let me hear one mo' word about how you doin'!" She followed her daughter, shaking her switch, but Reba ran into the kitchen, picked up the scouring cloth and began washing the pots still left in the sink.

When the dishes were done, she went onto the back porch and stood beside the steps, remembering once more the remarkable things she had seen that day. She sat down by the window on an upturned scrubbing bucket and began plaiting the strands of an old mop with her black fingers. Then she got up quickly, having forgotten her mother's wrath, and went again to the side yard, but this time she did not go near the gate; instead, she sat in the swing that hung from the limb of a small sycamore tree.

The swing and the tree were partly surrounded by the half-circle of crêpe-myrtles and cypress saplings, and it would be difficult for Mrs. Kirby to see her there. She gripped the two ropes of the swing and propelled herself backward and forward, her head nodding rhythmically to the creaking of the ropes, one bare skinny leg dragging in the dust like a brake.

Between gaps in the shrubbery she caught glimpses of the sidewalk. Many people were coming to the funeral now, and when she twisted sideways and craned her neck she could see them open the gate and walk on tiptoes up the gravel path. At length the minister turned in at the gate, and the funeral service was about to begin. The minister was dressed in black, and he was tall and solemn. His eyes, at once stern and forgiving, looked searchingly at the congregated people before he inclined his head a little, as if he gave his blessing to all alike.

Reba began swinging wildly, her head higher than the limb to which the swing was fastened, her black, outthrust legs agitating the tops of the crêpe-myrtles. It was then she saw, above the tops of the shrubbery, that there was no longer room for visitors inside the house, and that latecomers stood on the porch outside. Beyond the gate, on the sidewalk, the classmates of the dead child waited, their backs pressed against the picket fence.

She swung back and forth furiously and laughed with a strange excitement which she did not understand. Then all at once she became quiet. She brought the swing to a standstill as quickly as she could, trailing one leg in the dust as a brake, and glanced fearfully from Mrs. Kirby to her mother.

Mrs. Kirby said: "You can't hear anything inside except that swing creaking back and forth, and it looks from the windows like a hurricane had hit the tops of those crêpe-myrtle bushes."

"Come away from that swing, gal!" said Cora angrily. "Come away, like I tell you!"

"Yassum," said Reba in her soft, meek voice. "Yassum."

She sidled cautiously away, and when she had the shrubbery between herself and her mother, she began to run. She ran as far as the old carriage-house, but she stopped there, grinning foolishly. "You see, Mrs. Kirby?" said Cora. "You see?"

When Mrs. Kirby had gone, Cora walked toward the carriage-house but she stopped when she was almost there. "What make you pick a day like this to act so crazy?" she asked. "If it wasn't disrespectful to the daid, I'd whup you within an inch of your life." She went back to her work, pretending that she had forgotten about the swing, and a few moments later Reba came trotting up the path.

Cora seized her by the neck when she came in the door. "Now, Miss," she said triumphantly. "I got you now, and I ain't gwiner let you get away from me agin." She shoved her down onto the stool beside the stove and thrust a bowl into her hands. "Here, gal," she said. "Finish shelling them peas." She went into the pantry and began sifting flour on her breadboard. "Say something, Reba," she said. "Keep saying something so I'll know you ain't run off agin."

"I don't know nothing to say."

"Say yassum. Keep saying yassum."

"Yassum," said Reba meekly.

She picked up the bowl and began shelling the peas, thinking once more of the funeral. It was the first time she had seen a funeral for white folks, and she had not imagined that anything could be so magnificent; but there was much that she did not understand, and as her mother walked from pantry to kitchen and back again, she considered these puzzling matters with her slow mind. A week ago the little girl who had died had merely been another child, like any other, but with death she had taken on a strange sort of importance; and people who had hardly known her now crowded the house for the privilege of looking at her; they wept openly for her; they wore black in her honor; they sent her flowers.

It was then that Mrs. Kirby came into the kitchen and asked Cora if she wanted to see the little girl for the last time. Cora began to cry, wiping her eyes on her skirt. She rolled down her sleeves, put on a clean apron, and followed Mrs. Kirby into the hall; but she stopped in the doorway and spoke warningly: "Keep sitting on that stool until I get back, Reba," she said. "You move one inch off that stool and I'm going to put a knot on your head. See if I don't."

"Yassum," said Reba meekly. "Yassum."

She sat quietly for a time, trying to concentrate on the peas before her, but when somebody began to play on a fiddle, and somebody began to sing a white-folks' hymn which was both sad and comforting, she could hold out no longer. She put down the bowl and twisted her raveling plaits, rolling her black, bullet-shaped head from side to side. Then she got up from the stool and went through the back door. "Yassum," she said pleadingly in the direction her mother had taken. "Yassum."

When she turned the corner of the house, she saw that the hearse and the carriages for people to ride in to the cemetery had come. The hearse was drawn by white horses and they stood, now, shaking out their manes and biting at each other's necks. Reba took in these details quickly and then dropped to her hands and knees, following the line of shrubbery that circled the house. She crawled carefully, and when she reached the parlor window, she stretched her thin neck upward and peered in.

The first thing she saw was the coffin. It was set in the middle of the room. It was pure white and beautiful, and it was piled high with flowers. There were silver handles to the coffin, and streamers of white ribbons hung from its sides. She caught her breath with amazement. She stared with her mouth half-open, her eyes wide with wonder.

The preacher stood beside the casket and comforted the weeping people. Then he turned and spoke to the parents of the dead child: The ways of God are not our ways, and it was not given to mortals to understand them. We could only bear our losses with fortitude, and this mother and this father must comfort themselves in the knowledge that their child was not dead in the real sense of the word, but that she awaited them in heaven.

Reba sighed and shifted her weight. She craned forward a little, and she saw her mother standing against the far wall. Cora's shoulders shook with her grief, and at intervals she lifted her apron and pressed it flat against her streaming eyes. All at once Reba sank back on her haunches, her face cupped in her palms. "Yassum," she said softly, drawing the word out interminably. "Yassum."

The service was over at last and men carried the coffin down the steps and put it into the waiting hearse, piling the flowers around it. Then, when the carriages were filled and the hearse moved away, Reba could remain hidden no longer. She went again to the fence and stared openly, dragging her feet in the dust. The procession was under way now, and as it moved off, the schoolchildren, who had waited so patiently, fell in behind the last carriage and marched solemnly.

The last carriage had disappeared around the corner when Reba felt her head jerked backward and heard her mother's voice. "Now, then!" Cora said. "Now, then, I'll settle with you, Miss!" She shoved her daughter forward until they reached the old carriage-house. Reba fell down and pressed her face into the dust. "Don't whup me," she begged. "I won't do it no more. Don't whup me, please, ma'am." But her mother brought the stick down over her cringing head and shoulders. "You gwiner mind me," she said. "From now on, you gwiner do what I tell you!"

The whipping was over at last and Cora started back to the house, but she stopped in the path. "They'll be back from the graveyard in a little while, and they'll be hongry. I got to get supper going," she said. Then she sighed despairingly and raised her arms outward. "What make you *do* the way you do, Reba?" she asked. "What make you provoke me the way you do?" She rolled down her sleeves. "I ain't a mean woman. Ever'body knows I ain't a mean woman."

"Yassum," said Reba.

"Go wash that blood off'n your haid," said Cora, "and then bring me in some stovewood."

"Yassum," said Reba meekly. "Yassum."

She waited until her mother was in the kitchen and then she stood up, leaning against the door. She unbuttoned her dress and turned her head sideways, examining the bruises on her scarred back. She touched the bleeding place on her head and began to cry again. "Yassum," she said. "Yassum." She sank to the ground once more, her hands, with fingers interlocked, clutched between her thin, black knees. She rocked back and forth and made her foolish, intaken sound. "Yassum!" she said over and over. "Yassum! Yassum! Yassum!"

She got up after a while and carried in the wood for her mother, but when the box was filled, she went again to the side yard and stood at the gate. It was beginning to get dark, and already the cypresses and the crêpe-myrtle bushes cast shadows against the house. Before her, on the gravel walk, were the heads of flowers, fixed by florist's wire to toothpicks, which had fallen from the mossy designs in which they had originally rested. Reba picked up the flowers and stuck them into her tightly plaited, nappy hair, until it looked, after a moment, as if she wore a white wreath on her head.

Afterwards she went to the swing and shoved herself backwards and forwards, thinking once more of the little white girl's funeral. At first it had seemed to her that the funeral could not have been more magnificent, but familiarity with its details made her, now, more critical; and as she swung back and forth, one leg dragging in the dust like a brake, she talked to herself:

"When I have *my* funeral," she said, "I'm gwiner have me a band, too. Gwiner have *all* white horses at my funeral, and folks gwiner send up rockets that night."

Then, slowly, she let the swing come to rest and sat quietly.

Something important had occurred to her and she was motionless for a time, her hands gripping the ropes of the swing. "Why, I can have a funeral, too, if I feel like it," she said in surprise. "Nothing to stop me from having a funeral as good as *anybody,* if I want to."

She swung back and forth slowly, pondering this idea, her toes almost reaching to the edge of the crêpe-myrtle bushes. It seemed to her at that moment that she had found out, unaided, a fact of great importance, a thing which should be known to everybody, but was not. She opened her eyes very wide. She threw back her bullet-shaped head, and made her foolish, intaken sound. The thing she had discovered seemed so simple, so easy to arrange, that she wondered why everybody else didn't think of it too.

"Why, there ain't nothing to having a funeral," she said contemptuously. "I can have a funeral if *I* want to; ever'body can have a funeral if *they* want to." She swung more rapidly, her legs shooting up above the top of the crêpe-myrtles. When she remembered again the words the preacher had spoken as he stood beside the white child's coffin that very afternoon, it did not seem sensible that anybody would want to live in a world as harsh as this one was when they could have, so easily, not only eternal happiness in heaven, but a magnificent funeral as well. She brought the swing to a stop and got up. She took the wooden seat from the swing and stood it carefully against the trunk of the tree.

She hesitated a moment, then, having made up her mind, she climbed the sycamore like a small, excited monkey, anxious to put her plan through before her mother or Mrs. Kirby found out what she was up to and stopped her. She straddled the limb to which the swing was fixed and unfastened the knots in the rope; she wound the rope around the limb until she had shortened it expertly to the length she needed, laughing all the time with pleasure and nodding her head in anticipation of her triumph.

Cora came onto the porch and called, "Reba? Reba, where you at? I want you to go to the meat market for me."

But Reba flattened against the tree. She held her breath while her mother continued to call, seeing again, in her mind's eye, the triumphant details of her approaching funeral. First, there were the white horses and the brass bands. The bands played slow, sad music continuously, and the proud horses, as if conscious of the importance of such an occasion, pawed at the ground and shook out their white, silken manes. Mrs. Kirby was dressed in black silk, and she pressed a lace handkerchief to her eyes. She stood at the front door to take the floral designs, explaining the details of Reba's death to the mayor of the town, the minister of the Baptist church, and the unending stream of lesser people who crowded behind them.

"It's little Reba, this time," said Mrs. Kirby. "Yes, sir, it's little Reba, and we're all so upsot we just don't know *what* to do!" She began to cry again. "Looks like we don't get shut of one funeral in this house till we have another one, now does it?" She bowed her head submissively. "Yassum," she continued, as if answering a particular question, "Reba was a sweet child, and no two ways about it. I tell you *ever'*body gwiner miss Reba, and that's a fact!"

Cora called from the porch: "Reba! Reba! Where you at? You better answer me, gal, if you know what's good for you!" She stood a moment on the steps as if debating a point, then she went toward the old carriage-house, mumbling to herself angrily. When she was out of earshot, Reba spoke: "Yassum," she said in her small, meek voice. "Yassum, I hears you."

She stretched her neck and peered around the trunk of the tree, but when her mother reached the carriage-house and went inside, she bent down and caught up the dangling rope. Then she straddled the limb and inched forward cautiously. She stopped when she reached the middle of the limb and looked about her. She lifted the rope and wrapped it around her throat, tying a knot solidly at the side. "Yassum," she said, drawing the word out interminably. "Yassum."

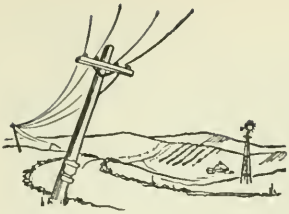
Cora came away from the carriage-house and stopped beside the canna bed. "I knows you're hiding out someplace," she said. "I knows as well as I'm standing here that you hear every word I'm a-saying." She went back onto the porch and took a drink of water, throwing what was left in the dipper onto the ground with a faint splash.

But Reba sat quietly for a time, her black knees gripping the sycamore limb, looking about her slowly and listening to her mother's voice. At that instant she had a clear picture of Cora weeping over her coffin, just as she had wept over the coffin of the while child. "Reba! Reba, come back to us!" she said over and over, her face twisted with the force of her grief. "Don't leave us here to mourn, sweet little Reba! Don't leave us this a-way, honey!"

Then Reba drew back her head and made her foolish, intaken sound. "Yassum," she said softly. "Yassum." Suddenly she lifted her arms and swayed forward. She unlocked her knees from the limb and fell eagerly, the rope pulling her up and jerking her head sideways. At once she lifted her lathlike arms and tried to grasp the limb above her head, but she could not; then she jerked her body convulsively and made a shrill, strangled noise while the rope spun outward in a circle.

Cora said: "I hear you, Miss. I hear you laughing and acting silly and provoking me!" She shook her shoulders angrily. "All right, stay where you is! You'll get hongry befo' long, and then I'll catch you!" She went inside and rattled the stove-lid, throwing in firewood. A few minutes later she came back to the porch and looked about her again.

"There ain't no way to get away from me, gal," she said. "You'd know that by now if you had any sense." She looked straight at the clump of crêpe-myrtles that screened the swing from the house and raised her voice a little, as if she addressed personally the bundle which hung limp and strangled at the end of the still-vibrating rope. She said: "When I get supper cooked I'm gwiner come look for you; and when I look for you I'm gwiner *find* you; and when I find you I'm gwiner give you a whupping you'll *remember!*"



Wolf Hunt

A. J. Broadwater

NEVER having made an effort to write a story I don't expect this will read very good. However, I have had some great experiences in hunting, having come to Montana in 1886, when game was plentiful; and as I was always a great lover of hunting, I have had some wonderful experiences. I recall one in particular and am going to try to describe it. It would certainly make good reading, particularly to the young nimrods of today, if one with the proper ability for details of description could write it. I will, however, do the best I can.

About 23 years ago, I owned a pack of 15 well-bred and well-trained wolf hounds, and kept 3 saddle horses, using alternately a horse and five dogs, to catch coyotes, whose pelts at that time were valueless as furs, but there was three dollars bounty paid by the State, and the same amount for buffalo wolves, aside from this feature as an incentive for their destruction. There is no form of hunting I have ever known which offers anywhere near the thrill and excitement as having a good pack of dogs and a good horse under your knees and sighting a coyote, off say half a mile. No one can fully appreciate the excitement and expectancy, but one who has experienced this form of sport.

The Lobo or Buffalo Wolf was extremely scarce with us, even at this early date. This species of wolf is about the most formidable antagonist, when cornered, that I know of. They grow to an enormous size, often weighing close to two hundred pounds, and are quick as a cat. One of such animals I have seen kill a three-year-old steer, and do it quickly and easily. They can bite a cow's tail entirely off, or hamstring them, or a horse, as they run past them, felling them almost in their tracks, after which it takes only a few minutes to dispatch them.

My brother Harry and I started on a certain day for our regular coyote hunt. I had 5 dogs (the pick of my pack) and one particularly valuable dog (Blacktail by name), very fast, a killer, and a particular pet of mine, whom I had often seen kill his coyote without assistance from the rest of the dogs; also a large hound called Wallace (a half boar hound and half Great Dane). Wallace never had been whipped by dog or beast. In fact, all of my five dogs at this time were of the very best. My brother also had a pack of 7 good dogs.

We selected for our hunting grounds of this day, a large lease tract of about 20,000 acres, where Mr. Simon Pepin ran his winter herd of beef cattle. We separated upon entering this lease, Harry going parallel and about a mile off my route. I had ridden only about a mile when a band of antelope arose from sage in front of me. Off went my dogs in chase of them. I knew I had no dog in this pack which was fast enough to catch them; so there was nothing for me to do but await their return. I waited for possibly half or three-quarters of an hour, and was finally rewarded by noting them coming back. I sighted them about a mile off, strung out in single file. I began counting them to see if they were all coming back. I counted 7 dogs, and knowing this was 2 more than I had, I came to the conclusion that two of my brother's dogs had taken up the chase of the antelopes and were coming back to me with my dogs. I now got out my field glasses and discovered the last two were Lobo wolves, following my dogs back. This was very exciting news to me. (I know of no other way of describing the sensation than to give an illustration.) You will possibly know the sensation which seizes a fellow when he is shooting rabbits, and a wild turkey flies up in front of him? Or when hunting deer, to suddenly behold an elk close by?

Well, I hurriedly got my dogs together, back-tracked them around a hill, and into a gorge, and there I rested them for half an hour for a big scrap. I was reasonably sure that the wolves, when they arrived at where the dogs joined me with the horse, would follow no farther, and expected they would lie around in the vicinity for some time. Having rested my dogs up, I cut across the top of a hill directly for the point where the dogs had arrived on return from the antelope chase, and found my calculations true. I found, on mounting to the top of the hill, lying in the coulee directly under me, one of the finest and largest specimens of wolves ever seen. I yelled at the top of my lungs, "Take 'im, boys!"—this being the signal for the dogs to go into action, and you can be sure they were not slow in taking up the challenge.

Before that wolf had run fifty feet, the dogs were upon him. I really expected to see pieces of that wolf scattered over an acre of ground in a short time, and was sorry Harry was not there to see the fight.

Well, it was some fight, all right, but did not turn out as I expected. All of the dogs piled onto him at about the same time, and soon pulled him down. But he didn't stay down, much to my surprise. He was up almost as soon as down, and had grabbed one of the dogs, threw him ten feet, and was after another dog, trying to catch him. The dogs rallied again and again, but each time the air was full of dog hairs and yelps, keeping up a fast running fight all the time.

At last, my best dog, Blacktail, lay badly wounded and lacerated, and the rest of the pack whipped to a frazzle. I never got in shooting distance, it was done so quick. I had my shotgun and some bird-shot shells along, swung under my saddle skirt, thinking I might run into a bunch of sage hens on the trip.

About this time Harry came up with his fresh pack of dogs, and renewed my hopes; but Mr. Wolf polished off this bunch of fresh dogs quicker than he did mine. He ran off about half a mile, and stood watching us from the skyline. I looked at poor Blacktail, think I shed a few tears, but the anger I felt gave me an inspiration. "Harry, you take Blacktail on your horse down to Mild River, wash his wounds, and wait there for me. I'm going to kill that wolf or crack a rib."

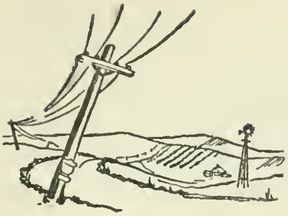
I was riding my top horse, Babe, half-breed Hamiltonian and cayuse, who had done a quarter in 26 seconds on track, and I knew was good for 60 miles at a gallop. The wolf proved very accommodating, and waited until I was within a quarter of a mile of him before starting to run. There was a long flat of seven miles in front of us, without a coulee or break. I let Babe take it rather easy for a time, and gave him his head. He knew exactly what I wanted him to do. For the first two miles his Wolfship wasn't the least worried, only occasionally looking back over his shoulder; but as I began to draw closer and closer, he put on all the speed he had, his long tongue lolled out of his mouth. But Babe gained steadily. I noticed in the distance some badlands, and made an extra effort to finish the race before we came to these, but without success. I raced up within thirty feet of him several times, and tried to shoot from the running horse, but don't think I came within many feet of hitting him, at any of my shots.

I have heard and read of this feat of people who killed their game from a running horse. This stuff is all the bunk. The man never lived who could hit a target as big as an elephant thirty feet away from a running horse, with a rifle or shotgun, either. They might handle a revolver with some little degree of accuracy, but I doubt it.

My wolf made these badlands before I could head him off. There is where I should have pulled up and stopped, but it never occurred to me to do so. By the very greatest of good luck I rode through a mile of these badlands at breakneck speed, where every jump of a horse was courting death. I recall at one place, an almost perpendicular descent of 100 yards and a short rise of ten or twelve feet, at the top of which we ran right into an old crater about twelve feet across. I could see no bottom. We were directly on top of this, running at full speed, before I discovered it. There was no possible chance to stop or turn the horse. I recall throwing my feet out of the stirrups, thinking I might grasp the edge of the crater when the horse fell into it. I thought this would be my last wolf chase, but that game little horse cleared that twelve feet of space as easily as I could step three feet. I knew of a water-hole a short way off, and supposed the wolf would make for this. When I was within twenty steps of the water-hole, I slid from the saddle, and ran up to the bank, looking down into the water-hole to see the wolf just quitting the bank on the far side. I gave him both gun barrels. The only effect was to turn him a cherry red in rear, and make him bite at himself.

I now had to race back to the pony, as my only hope was to head him off before he reached some very formidable badlands, where no horse could go. Babe was equal to the occasion. I ran by the wolf just before he reached the gulch. I ran the horse about 40 yards past him, and slipped out of the saddle shotgun in hand. The wolf stopped dead still, gave me a look-over, rolled his lips back from his teeth, laid his ears down on his head, and charged straight at me, his mouth open. I was waiting for him to come within ten or twelve feet, before firing, as I knew if I missed he would soon finish me off. But he never came that close. It was all a bluff. He charged within 20 feet and stopped again, started to veer off around me, and I fired. The charge almost tore his head off.

I did not take the measurements of this animal, as I had nothing to do it with, but I had often loaded 175-pound buck deer on this same pony, but try as I would, and I certainly worked hard and long at the try, I could not load this wolf on the pony. So I skinned him, or rather her, there. The pelt was almost as large as a yearling calf.



Mountain Sibyl

Nancy Clemens

AUNT HALEY GODWIN was almost "th' death o' me," to use her own immortal words. Not that she took pot shots at me from ambush in the quaint Ozarkian way. She was more subtle. She used the black arts.

When I first saw Aunt Haley she was bending over a beehive, tying a black cloth to the top and muttering, "She's dead. Niece Ruth is dead."

Then she saw me and hobbled over to inquire what I wanted.

"I was a-tellin' th' bees," she confided, peering at me from under a faded slat sunbonnet. "Allus tell th' bees when there's a death in th' family or they'll swarm out an' leave."

Having been an Ozark highlander, I did not inquire why this dreary news would make the bees contented at home. Instead I gave the old lady my complete life history—in the best detailed Ozarkian fashion—adding that I was suffering from a nervous breakdown and had returned to the hills to recuperate. I said I wanted to buy fresh eggs and "garden truck" from her. I had faint hopes that this information would cause my Mother Hubbard-clad Prophet of Woe to lighten the general trend of her conversation. I should have known better.

There is nothing mountain women like better than to sit around a sickbed recalling fatalities with similar symptoms. The mountaineer makes a dramatic episode of death and Aunt Haley could trace her hill heritage back through Kaintuck to North Caroliny.

From that day on I literally lived in fear of death. Aunt Haley took it upon herself to protect me from the evil influences that hover over the superstitious Ozarks backwoods. I do not mean that she was a witch. Nowadays in the hills a "witch" is a woman who tells fortunes. Aunt Haley's "main holt" was "th' signs." She told folks when to plant gardens; she advised against killing hogs or building rail fences or putting on new clapboards in the wrong light of the moon. And when it came to forestalling death she was in her element.

She called one Friday afternoon to bring me a buckeye, which would avert rheumatism and bring general good luck, and was horrified to find me making a dress.

"I'll set right down an' baste th' seams fer you," she said. "You'll never on Gawd's earth git hit done afore dark if I don't pitch in an' holp out."

Since I was in no hurry for the dress, sartorial standards being low in the hills, I could not see that this was important and said so.

"I'm not going anywhere tonight," I said, "and anyhow I'm just making it to pass time."

"You'll be a-goin' to your grave if you ain't careful," she said darkly. "Don't ye know that if ye cut out a dress on a Friday and don't finish hit th' same day ye'll die afore ye kin wear it as shore as Gawd made little fishes?"

She then cheered me with the tale of Ankle Willie Benskin's eldest gal who cut out a Sunday-go-to-meetin' red-checkered gingham dress on a Friday. Ankle Willie, who was a shiftless man, had used the store calendar to start a fire because he was too lazy to cut kindling and they'd sort of lost track of time. Cally Benskin ran out of thread and nobody passed by going to the store; so the dress was carelessly put aside. The next day a mule kicked Cally in the head and she wore the dress as a shroud.

"That very night th' clock struck thirteen times," Aunt Haley said impressively. "They knowed then whut had happened but 'twas too late. Th' pore child was as good as dead. They didn't even have an almanac for t' tell th' day 'cause Ankle Willie'd let th' mailbox fall plumb down."

She sighed heavily and asked me if I didn't have any kinfolks to come and stay with me. It wasn't natural, she said, for a lone woman to live in a cabin. Anything might happen to me. The expression on her wrinkled-apple face showed that she was thinking of numerous dire fates that might befall me. However, she contented herself with saying that I might die in bed and not be discovered for days.

This upset me so that I knocked over a chair. Aunt Haley looked sad. "Ye'll not be married within a year," she assured me.

"I'm always clumsy," I told her. "I dropped the broom last night when I was sweeping the trash out the front door. Then I almost sprained an ankle stepping over it."

Aunt Haley virtually gave me up then. I had acquired bad luck by stepping over the broom and by sweeping at night. Furthermore I had swept out my luck by using the front door.

At this appropriate moment a picture fell off the wall. I had used thumbtacks and the pictures were always being loosened and sliding to the floor. Aunt Haley said dolefully that this was a "shore sign o' death."

From then on I collected so much evidence of my early demise that the whole business held a morbid fascination. I didn't see how I could live. Aunt Haley brought me an assortment of good luck charms varying from little crayfish pearls to Irish potatoes and rocks with holes in them, but everything considered I do not believe her visits were beneficial to my nerves.

Once she eyed the blue crepe dress I was wearing. "That dark dress'd make a good buryin' outfit," she said. "I got my buryin' clothes all put away 'ith rose beads, my good black dress and good store-bought muslin underclothes with tattin' on all the edges. I'm goin' t' be put away decent. I've allus said you never kin tell whut's goin' t' happen and I want t' be ready when my time comes."

She then told me about a man who had kept his coffin in his living room for fourteen years. It was made of wood from a tree cut down in his front yard. When its beauties were not being demonstrated to visitors, it made a convenient bench.

I tried to restore my luck and my spirits by walking around a chair three times, according to Aunt Haley's directions. But the next day I went to town and in my stupidity had my hair cut after dark, which is very bad luck, as the village barber told me after I had paid him.

In one horrible week, I heard a dog howl at night, a rooster crow at four o'clock in the morning, a hen cackle in the dooryard. I whirled a chair and I spilled salt. I hit an empty chair so that it rocked. I put a stamp upside down on a letter, a bird flew in through the window, and Aunt Haley found a lightning bug in the house.

"One more or one less in th' house next day," she said cheerily.

She went back to muttering some weird incantation over a finger smashed when she nailed a horseshoe over my front door. I started to chase out the offending bug.

"Gawdamighty, put yore shoe on," shrieked Aunt Haley, forgetting her wound. I was hobbling around with one foot clad only in a stocking. "Hits bad luck," she added. "Ever' step ye take'll be more bad luck. Ye stay there and I'll fetch this yere slipper."

So I stood in the middle of the floor on one foot while she brought my other shoe. It was then, I think, that I began to rebel against the soothing qualities of the isolated valleys of the Ozarks.

I caught a bad cold kneeling in damp grass hunting for four-leaved clovers after I had counted the birds in a flock resting in a near-by tree. It is very bad luck to count birds. I learned the same day that I must not kill the cat that yowled under my window all night.

In my carelessness I forgot to fill my kerosene lamp, and it went out while I was reading. Aunt Haley was shocked when I told her.

"There'll be a death in the family sartin shore," she said. "Have ye heerd from yore folks lately?"

I hope I have made it clear why I defied the doctor and brought my nervous breakdown back to the hectic city. Now I do not hear owls hooting at night and wonder who is dying. I do not listen with fiercely beating heart to dogs howling, roosters crowing, hens cackling, and crows cawing. In fact I have virtually recovered. But not quite. The other day a friend of mine was talking of her new interest in quilting.

"I had to come down town to buy a needle," she said. "I broke the only one I had this morning."

I remembered Aunt Haley. "Oh, my Lord," I said. "You'll die before it's finished."

She merely stared at me and edged away. But I shall hang a turkey-hen pulleybone over her door. And if I can find a spare tooth anywhere I shall ask her to keep it under her pillow.

THE COUNTRY IS THE LAND

James Franklin Lewis

The city is full of straights and narrows;
But the country is broad as everywhere;
Is broad as nowhere;
The country is the land.

The city is tights in angles, fits;
But the country is copious chaos;
Is a million-bladed space;
The country is broad as color.

The city is swept with wind or broom;
Is polished as to brass;
Is paved against the plow;
Is paved with feet and stone;
Is given to starks and blazing noise;

But the country is full of whispers,
And the trees are good talkers;
It is broad and nowhere,
Going its full breeze everywhere;
The country is the land.

And the mud sticks to the field;
And the water-soluble lights of stars
Lose their point in the branch creek;
And the frogs awake on waste islands in it,
Where the crane treads cautiously,
And the wild geese are swans;
At the wood-edge tips a doe, too,
And in the cut agate of her eye
The hard mineral peace of ages
Somehow is mockworthy, and tender,
As the child who wonders toward her.

Pull out all the stops and play the city
Into the inner alleys of its echoes;
The city is full of straights and narrows,
Rules for the playing of rules by rules
And breaking them again upon their own stones;
But the country is quiet and everywhere;
Is quiet and nowhere;
The country is the land.

WASHING UP FOR SUPPER

Carol Ely Harper

Grey night on the grey
sagebrush plateau

bulk wheat no longer
whistling rustling murmuring

out of the two-ton
truck into the trough the

revolving bore struck by the
rusted disks and lifted upwards

the high thin pipe of the farm
elevator into the half finished

silver glistening grain storage
bin, with the men still putting

in the bolts . . . The header quiet
in a long wing stiff out of the

combine . . . silent on the wheat hill
in the clipped stubble and the

waving wheat waiting beyond. . . . The men
washing in pans of blackened water

on the back steps, black faces slowly
streaked with white and the flesh

peering through as the dust rolls
off and the pan cakes in mud . . .

Men no longer lying in bulk wheat in
the truck and in the bin and laughing

and burrowing up to their knees and
shoveling bulk wheat, and jumping

to the dry ground to chase the
two red pigs from before the truck

wheels, and the pigs following them
right back, and the fat hired man

spitting tobacco juice steady, and
the red-backed big boy with a headache

from the sun, and all the men
pulling, one after another, at the

sack and twine wrapped cool
wet water jug.

Timber Justice

Robert Swift

"THE TROUBLE with all this dealin' out justice," said old "Juniper" Hornkohl, as he scratched his sunburned hands reflectively, "is that man in general don't know when he's givin' his brother a fair deal. Some dratted sneak thief is jest as likely to get fined fifty dollars and costs when he'd oughta been fed to the crows. And t'other way 'round, of course, of course. But she's a dinged funny critter, this here Lady Justice. She may be as cross-eyed as a cinnamon bear, an' still she has a way o' comin' around when she's least expected. Now I mind me the time. . . ."

And he unfolded his arms to tell a startling tale.

The crew of Old Crow camp, wintering in Michigan timber, had settled back into silence. Tired men have no lasting desire to talk. The day had been a hard one, for the wind drove sleet against the teams, and it had been cold and dangerous for sledding.

The evening meal had been somewhat trying, especially for Juniper. A month-old newspaper had found its way to camp, and with it had come the news of an Oregon murder. Someone had stabbed Captain "Jack" Elting, a Michigan boy in the Manitoba Mounties, and a friend of them all. He had led his last raid. The murderer, if such he was, had escaped the law and fled. Some said he was traveling for his health on the Pacific, or perhaps in Mexico, and some reports located him in Michigan. And that had started a dispute, contrary to traditional woods law, which ordains that meals must be eaten in silence, to avoid fights. Juniper loved to argue. Obliged by his responsibility as foreman to frown upon this serious breach of camp etiquette, he had suffered the full measure of a temptation to enter the argument himself. It had begun when "Teetotal" King, with his usual ask-me-I-know air, and a bold light in his eyes, said loudly, "You cain't tell me the guy has went to China. He came inland, I say; and fur all I know, he may be right har in Michigan." He dropped his eyes when they all stared at him.

But that brazen defiance of tradition, coupled with the hint of a murderer somewhere in the neighborhood, had been too much. Talk broke out, at first in guilty mumbling behind forks, then hotly up and down the table. Above it all rasped King's hoarse voice, as he tried to prove now that the murderer was in Mexico, until Juniper, mastering his temptation, pounded on the table and yelled, "By the powers! Is this a women's tea party? The next blasted weasel that tries to open his chops peels potatoes, d'ya hear?"

The meal was finished more quietly, for Juniper ruled men by his tongue, as King could have done with his great bulk of muscle and bone. The table cleared, the men ventured in little groups through the whirling storm outside, and soon were lounging about in the bunkhouse near by.

The chill and dark outside were not reflected by the interior of the shack. The stove glowed red-hot; the lanterns blinked in clouds of blue smoke rising from the pipes; the steam of the lumberjacks' sweating bodies, the strong odor of tobacco, the acrid smell of brandy became choking. Now silence hung over the room, as it must have reigned in Eden before the arrival of man.

King, called "Teetotal" because of his much-boasted aversion to "the Devil's drink," sat on the edge of his bunk whittling a good piece of kindling into shavings. Everyone knew what he would do after the last stick was chopped up. He would gather together all the scattered bits, prying into every crack of the floor for a stray splinter, carry them carefully to the stove and throw his handful into the blaze, "wettin' 'em down," as he never failed to explain, with a stream of black tobacco-juice. Then he would wipe his mouth with the back of his hand, pick up another piece of shingle, and go back to his bunk.

But nobody made the usual remark about "gettin' old an' childish" tonight. And King seemed to have repented his outburst at table. Even Juniper, who talked more than all the rest put together, only whistled halfheartedly through his teeth and rattled the fateful newspaper suggestively on his knee. Far be it from him to start another argument, but. . .

Juniper was secretly lamenting the peacefulness of things. "There ain't," he grumbled to himself, "been a honest-to-goodness fight sence I hit this here hole in the ground. Lumberjacks is gettin' to be a bunch o' sissies, that's what they is!" He prepared to spit at the stove, but paused.

"Teetotal" King had seen the latchstring tighten; he straightened. The men turned toward the door. The latch slipped up with a snap; and the rough plank door swung open, groaning.

A man stepped into the room. He must have lacked five inches of seven feet; his round shoulders filled the doorway. His ragged, black beard sprawled over his chest; his head was bare; his dirty, coarse hair stood out and hung over his face. His body was nearly naked, clothed only in rags that once were shirt and trousers. His clenched hands seemed like two jagged rocks. But in his eyes there was a look that held the gaze; it was burning, wild, tensely holding. No one said a word. The giant stamped his feet, shook himself like a huge bear, and walked to a stool by the stove, all without a word. Still no one spoke.

Juniper slipped to the door and closed it. The ragged stranger sat staring, not moving, seeming to take no notice of anyone. Cautiously the men relaxed and commenced to smoke. But the silence was of a different kind now. It seemed to rush back and forth, to beat and pound like the wind outside.

Suddenly the man leaped to his feet. With a strange catlike tread he ran around the table and returned to the stove, pointed to the floor with a huge forefinger, and said, in full, deep voice that sent a cold stab into the heart of every man there: "Who spilled all that blood on the floor? . . . I'm the man that killed Captain Jack!"

A pipe dropped with a crash that rang in the following silence. Again he sat down; and Juniper looked at King. The man was staring fiercely at the intruder, a black scowl on his face, and fear in his eyes. He gripped the edge of his bunk, the hunting knife still in one hand. No one saw. No one spoke. The stranger sat and stared from terrible red-rimmed eyes behind the mat of his hair. No one moved.

Again the unkempt giant hopped from his stool. With the same stooping trot, with a shadow, too, of a limp, he circled the table and came to a stop by the stove. He pointed to the floor, and the men stopped breathing.

"Who spilled all that blood on the floor?" he cried, in a cracked, yet powerful roar that shook the room. "I'm the man that killed Captain Jack!" He sat down again.

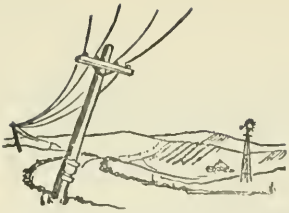
King jumped from his bunk. He seemed to have gone crazy. "That's a damned lie!" he screamed. "I killed Jack Elting!" And with a wild pitch of his arm, he threw the knife, and crouched tense and mumbling.

With a mad echoing screech, the grimy giant kicked out the stool and jumped up. Buried in his shoulder was the knife, clear to the hilt. A leap, and he was upon King before the startled score of men could even rise, and with one great heave, had seized him by neck and knees and cracked his back across the table as easily as snapping a match.

Then Juniper, his hand at the stock of his gun, made the shortest speech of his life. "Men," he said, in a voice that shook, "stay where you are!"

The giant looked at him dully, as if not understanding. He dropped his great arms, looked at the crumpled body on the floor, and said in a weary, toneless whine, "Who spilled all that blood on the floor?" Then, in a huge and thundering voice that made every logroller start to his feet: "I'm the man that killed Captain Jack!" He strode to the door, the knife still hanging in his shoulder, and shoved out into the night. The sleet beat against the door as it closed, and the latchstring dropped into place.

"You see," concluded Juniper Hornkohl, "one of them fellas killed Captain Jack, and I'll be hung, strung, an' quartered if I knows which on 'em 'twas." Then, as though he had just remembered, he spat at the stove.



Good-bye, Margery

August Derleth

IN the dusk the streetlights came on all over town, yellow-white lights strung out into the copper and saffron afterflow where it lay against the sky below the band of emerald cradling evening star and new moon, pale and luminous: first only the dying day, the gathering evening, and then, like a secret being told, being whispered for one ear alone, the lights flowered, the dead globes at street corners came softly to radiance, a web of them over Sac Prairie held in October's claret and ochre leaves: and I thought, as always: *There is a loneliness about streetlights and trees at night: soft afterglow, new moon, and evening star: yellow glow among the leaves, the line of bright stars reaching for the sun's last orange behind the hills, across the prairie....*

The swing creaked like an old hinge. No matter how little I pushed myself, how little the arc I made, the swing creaked and groaned, and in the still night, in the quiet twilight hour, the sound was very loud against the high wall of the school building behind me. I could look across to where Margery lived from there, and I could wait there where she had told me. Even while I was thinking, *There is a loneliness about streetlights and trees at night,* I was wondering about her, why she had told me to come here and not to the Park Hall, where we could meet in deep shadow, in darkness, as always, and no one could know, and I kept remembering what they said at home: *That girl's a temper; she's not for you. Don't you know? Why don't you trust your mother? I could tell you!* and Grandfather Adams saying, *Be still!* as if talking to himself in his big voice: *Great God in Heaven, Woman, don't you know that belief in his ability to make up his own mind is one of man's most cherished delusions? Let the boy alone.*

The swing creaked; it creaked as much if I made a small arc or a big arc, but it was too hard to sit still, the impatience in me and wonder, and something else: a nameless, blind wanting, a desire for afterglow, new moon, and streetlights, a fierce acceptance of the loneliness that lay along streets and walks, trees, spent lilac bushes, lemon bulbs of light, old houses: something I did not understand, but only felt; something bound to me, something always mine: something that made me the night's growing dark itself, the sweet smell of leaf-fire smoke drifting through town, the tremulous sad cry of a screech owl calling behind the old Park Hall where otherwise I waited.

The house was dark, but for a faint line of light seen through the front-room windows from where the kitchen door stood ajar, and I could see her as if no wall were there: washing dishes, her yellow hair pushed up along the back of her head, thick and heavy, her pale blue eyes quiet and tender, the rich, full mouth still; I could see her work in silence, and her big-bosomed mother drying dishes at her side, her father reading the *Capital Times,* shaking his head over it: *The paper ain't what it used to be since Old Bob La Follette died. It was too bad he had to go; he worked too hard.*

A wind grew out of the southwest, where the moon's thin blade lay on the trees: first small breezes scuttering the dry leaves along the ground, and then a stronger wind, a wind that tore at the dying foliage, that talked and murmured among limbs and began to sway the streetlights gently, the yellow glow swinging over the road and up dark boles of trees on the other side and back again. I could feel the loneliness mushrooming up inside me again, the lost feeling, as if there were something sweet and dear very far away, but still in sight, and some part of me tried always in vain to reach it again and urge it back to me: like the fading afterglow and the long line of lights stretching and dwindling into the copper fire along the hills.

Then I saw her come down the steps and cross under the light. She was dressed differently, and I knew something was wrong. I stopped swinging and sat very still, so still I hesitated to draw a breath lest I bring her closer and give life to the sudden sharp fear I felt. For a moment, after she had left the glow of the light and walked in shadow, I thought, *Nothing is changed,* and then she came up to me, and I saw that she was dressed in her Sunday dress, and her cheeks were rouged.

"You don't have to put on that stuff to look good," I said.

She sat down in the swing next to mine and put her hands together in her lap.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

The way she looked at me was strange, as if she were somebody else and I, too, different. "I can't go walking tonight," she said.

"What's the matter?" I asked again, feeling the quick upthrust of fear once more. "Has somebody been talking to your mother again?" *God damn these gossiping women!* I thought, and remembered the time somebody had told her mother I had been *acting like a man toward Margery.*

"No, Mother didn't say anything."

"Then what is it?"

"I'm going somewhere else," she said. "I thought I'd better tell you."

"Oh, if that's all," I said. But the relief did not come. I looked at her again. "But what are you made up for?"

"I thought maybe. . . ." She looked down and away. "I'm going out with somebody else—with Orin."

I was too surprised to say anything. If it had been anybody else, it wouldn't have meant so much, but everybody knew what Orin was: a good fellow, but not her kind, not my kind. Telling me that was like pouring cold water over me. I didn't feel bad, then; I got out of myself and looked at us, and I began to think of how my grandfather Grendon had once said, *He will be a rational man, but perhaps never happy.*

"You don't care, do you?" she asked.

"You know I care," I said.

"It won't make any difference between us, will it?"

"Yes, it will make a difference," I said. "It will make all the difference. You know we agreed, you know what we agreed; we don't have to talk about it now. You can remember it as well as I can."

"But it's so foolish," she said. "Seeing just each other like this."

"Maybe. But that's how I feel about it. We talked it over, and you felt that way then, too."

I thought: *If it happens once, it will happen again. If it hurts me once, it will hurt me again,* and I knew it must not be. Better the once and an ending and never the chance for it to happen again.

She stood up and came close to me and I stood up too, put my arms around her, and kissed her gently on the mouth. It was not the same. It would never be the same again. I remembered all the other times I had kissed her: that first time on the high-school steps in the shadow of the lilac bush, with the lavender blooms hanging low, in the car, at the school picnic behind the bandstand just when the moon was pushing up into the sky, and all those times on the hills; all those times knowing no one else had ever kissed her; she was mine alone, and I was hers. It would never be that way again.

I saw the car drive up before her home and I said, "There's Orin. You'd better go."

She kissed me quickly and looked at me with eyes a little doubtful, her forehead puckered. "Good night, Steve," she whispered.

"Good-bye, Margery," I said.

I watched her get into his car and go away with him, and I knew that no matter what happened, it would never be the same again. I could take her in my arms; I could kiss her; I could tell her, *I love you, Margery;* but it would be hollow, it would not be like once it was, and after a while, the queer, strange place, the empty place would no longer echo with memories.

I sat down in the swing, and it creaked as before. I sat still again. Down the west, the moon was a red sickle, broken by limbs of trees, and the sky glowed there with a luminous rose and saffron. Back and forth, the branches swung before the streetlights, bowing and scraping in the wind, and leaves tore away and went dancing down darkness to the ground, where they rustled along ditches, among bushes, down the streets and lanes. *Good-bye, Margery.* The dullness grew into pain; the hurt swelled and grew. *Good-bye, Margery.* I knew how it would be now, remembering how it had been: the way her lips could part and smile, the way her eyes took the white stars of spikenard when we found them on the hill slopes, the way darkness held her face and made it a symbol of all strange, unknown things. *He will be a rational man, but perhaps never happy.* I was not sure what Grandfather Grendon had meant, but I knew this was right: If she could not keep this faith, she would keep none.

The swing creaked and groaned. I got up and walked slowly out of the deserted schoolyard. All around me the night whispered: rustling leaves, an owl crying, limbs rubbing against each other, and the village sounds. The wind blew, and the streetlights swung to and fro, and the leaves whirled and raced in the yellow glow on the street below them. *There is a loneliness about streetlights and trees at night: Lemon lights, dark trees, far sky and stars: and wind that blows over all the earth, a wanderer, too, alone.* I went down the shadowed streets with this dark hurt inside me; I went to the Park Hall and the bandstand and all those other places I had been with her, and it was like saying *Good-bye, Margery* to everyone, the knowledge of an end within me, and how it must be. I remembered how we had talked about it a long time ago, both of us loving; it was as if we had said to each other, *I will not hurt you, if you will not hurt me,* both of us fearing above all else the fierce, tearing hurt that comes with disillusionment and sorrow in first love.

I went home and stood looking out toward the prairie, along the line of swaying streetlights, the lemon glow, and the bending trees, and I thought: *Nothing can take this away from me,* and the hurt pushed upward again, the terrifying loneliness, unreasoning, painful, with a blind onrushing that stung and smarted. *Good-bye, Margery.* Standing there in the wind, I remembered Grandfather Grendon again, the way he had sat in the glow of the green-shaded light over his kitchen table looking at me but speaking to my father, *He will be a rational man, but perhaps never happy,* as if he could know how it is to feel the quiet, eternal loneliness of streetlights and trees at night, and wind, as if he could know that to be rational is to be alone.

Good-bye, Margery.

I did not want to go into the house; I did not want to leave the wind blowing against me and the hurt that kept welling up into my throat from within and without. I knew the way Mother would look up and ask, *Were you with her again? How many times have I told you?* and how Grandfather Adams would interrupt his reading to say, *Great God in Heaven, let the boy alone!*

COLORADO POEMS

Will Gibson

LITTLE ELEGY

Now, as all roots call in their saps, and hung
in joy, in fear
each haunted leaf hears ebb its lock,
and tongue cries far to tongue
this year, this year

call in our loves: let finger and twig go dry
come snow, come deer
across our heelprints dumb in the rock:
for loves and leaf must die,
this year, this year.

A LETTER FROM COLORADO

Night, the fog is laired in ravine, lake, foothill,
the valley rank and laden, leaf dumb
In dull air, no moon and star above humpback toil
upon humpback ridge: secretly limb

and needle are drinking, finch and egg in the climb
of firs now sleep, small herds of deer
in the hemlock floors are hid, and the gopher is home
in the roots: the fog stirs not a hair:

all sleep, all sleep, but out on this rock, not hid,
not home, with hag and witch, I keep
a moonless watch by the slag

of the fire, laired in my ills, unroofed in my love,
dumb in this kithless range of hills,
far, inhuman, and strange.

GOPHER SKULL

Delicate, small as a nut, hollow and white,
whole in the grass, in the pick
and tug of ants, in winds that sift and suck
the gums in the socket, in light

that dries the cranial yolk, this house is frail
and emptied. Here is the ruin
you hied and digged and hid in the earth at noon
from heel and hawk, flickertail,

to wriggle away from: house, is it ill? or spent
witling out of this acorn skull,
is here a lodging to haunt? come back to? coil
as tenant now in this rackrent

bone, when pine needles fell as spears, the fox
overcrept the moon, and my wheedling
roared like rockslide in all your mines? Deed
to the roots your waters, the locks

and doors hang broken, be loose in this air, dumb,
at home from decision, be hill,
be fir, be light: while hasped in my bone I tell
of our fear, and will not come:

house, is it ill?

HYMN ON THATCHTOP

Dumb, be dumb on this eyebrow, kneel on the hair
and rock of his height
where cliff and shoulder fall by lair, hawk's nest,
ledge, and the rivers
reel in his palm: like sheaf and shock, his mountains
are gathered in boulder
by boulder below, their timber is green nap, fat coil
and reef of his cloud

hang quiet in gap and ravine: in these upper races
    of lights and the winds,
the hawk in space is moored and level, and veers
    in careen, and drops
like a keepsake let cry in the giant wake of air
    far down in jackstraw
and bed of gorge: and the eye of the lake is open:
    lean where his flesh
allays, be dumb, kneel giddy, be dumb on this godhead,
    dumb with his praise.

MOUNTAIN SONG

Eye at these hills now sucks,
    and not allays
its drouth in freshfall gullies
    by doe and buck,

and hand on this rock may hit,
    and dig no relief
of its hunger out of the reef
    where gophers sit,

and tongue is tied too wordless
    to loose its fill:
hid in the loin of these hills,
    of bark, of bird,

are the lode, waters, and cry
    I need, I need
and cannot dig, tell, or feed.
    Time will be

when eye will brim far below,
    and hand lie deep,
and tongue sing out in the sap:
    but how will I know?

A LITTLE BESTIARY

At night in my ear the fawn pigeon flew
moaning in love for her egg
in the lock of my temple, witching in hue
and cry, dazzled my sense, begged,

and I opened my ear: now come to the coil
of nest, all her sly witchery
settled to fop, cluck, idiot eye: dull,
loveless, unfed, lechery's

fool, when in daylight I looked, in my hand
sat the humpback, ugly as noon,
immobile toad: talisman out of the raw land
of unlove, stranger, oppugner,

I took him to heart: where in he distilled
his delicate poisons, clear
and medicinal, keen in my veins, killing
my pigeon, my liar, my fear.

"ROCK SAID, OLD GIANTS"

Rock said, old giants are in me, and roar in my hollows,
roofs, and beds: their knees crack me open,
raw hills ride up on their necks, my saps and marrows
in rivers leak out of flanks and slopes:

bone said, devils are in me, and lechers,
salts and tongues: my fill
is the fats of eels and slimes of witches
in conjugal ferns and pools:

rock said, doomsday is at me, the wind has its hooks
in my boughs and barks, rains in me crawl
and great antlers of ice in me uproot my ribs in breaks,
gorges and cliffs: I am ill, I am ill:

bone said, I am sick with my salt, loves
in me crawl and lick and cry,
I am lack, I am glutless: beggar of salves,
starveling, wild with decay:

rock cried, now groins break, gut flows, winter over us
gathers: bowelled of travail, no cure,
no cure, how long must we lie, and none to deliver us?

Bone rasped on bone, and said, endure.

TIMBERLINE

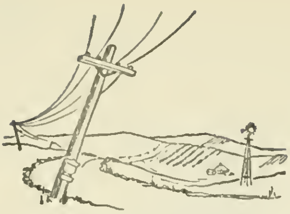
Gorgeful in gorgeful below me, pine, spruce, and fir,
the wilderness climbs, lush in creek
and bald at rock, but gathers its rank reach, floor
in mosses of timber to canyon cheek,

and dies at my heel. Here is the witchland of freak
growth, dwarf hags of wood, barkless
snake runs of tree, blight scarecrows in bough shrieks
from windward, famine choir, that marks

where decision ends. Ahead lie the disasters of rocks,
boulderfields, granite floe beneath floe,
rockslide, rockslide, immobile flint neutrals, lackless,
loveless, moors of big barebacks, and no

live roothold of choice: rock peace, rock peace, to grow
red thrifts of lichen rust. It is clear
these twistwood cripples appoint me down. I must go
in matted stuntpine by no trail, hearing

nightfall of waters, by low fern, by log, along moss tier
and edge, by foot feel in limb drop decay,
kithward by creek flow, down, down, where abed in the year
love glides its root, and the leaf is dismay.



A Thresher's Tale

Rudolph Umland

YES, son, I'm too old to run a rig now. Time brings changes. I'm an old man, and when I think back over all the changes I've seen, I feel my years. It saddens me to think of some of the changes I've seen.

Time was when a man had no trouble at all following the wheat harvest from Texas to the Dakotas and making a few dollars. That was when all wheat was cut with a binder, shocked, stacked sometimes, and then threshed. Farmers needed many hands during the harvesting season. Now combine machines that cut and thresh the grain in one operation are becoming more common every year. Farmers need fewer and fewer hands. One of the migratory hands that used to come up through this part of Nebraska was Frank McDarmit—Big Frank, we called him. He was a bundle-slinger if ever there was one.

The first time I had dealings with Big Frank, he took twenty dollars from me easy as nothing. I had just finished cutting fifty acres of wheat that I wanted shocked right away. I was afraid a rainy spell of weather might come along and spoil some of the grain. That was the finest field of wheat I ever raised; the bundles lay scattered three-deep over every inch of stubble. I hired Big Frank in the morning and told him I'd go to town and fetch some other shockers to help him.

Big Frank looked over the field, spat some tobacco juice, and said, "I don't need any help. I can shock that field myself and be finished by sundown."

"You're crazy," I said.

"Maybe I am," he said, "but I can still shock that field myself and be finished by sundown."

"Man, you can't."

"I can."

I looked at him and wondered what institution he'd escaped from.

"I'll bet you ten dollars I can," he said.

"I'll bet twenty you can't."

Big Frank spat on his hands, pulled on his gloves, and went to work. I never saw a bundle-slinger move so fast before. In less than an hour, I knew I was going to lose that bet.

Big Frank could shock wheat faster than any two binders could kick out the bundles. He could set up a shock ten feet away by just tossing the bundles where they belonged. Sometimes he'd pick up eight or ten bundles at once, set them down, and have as pretty a shock as you ever saw. No matter how hard a windstorm blew, Big Frank's shocks kept standing. He could hurl a bundle butt into the ground so deep that nobody could pull it up. He frequently did this out of pure orneriness to make the threshers cuss when they were gathering the bundles.

He was a one, that Big Frank! He never hired out as a shocker by the day. He always demanded pay by the acre. He wouldn't work in a field where there were other shockers; they got in his way. Why, damn it, he wouldn't even start shocking in a field where the grain wasn't all cut; he'd catch up with the binder in no time and then have to wait.

When Big Frank blew into a community, other hands moved on. They knew there wouldn't be much work left for them. All the farmers wanted to hire Big Frank. He was such a handy man to have around. The womenfolk liked him too; that's why there are so many youngsters named Frank in this part of the country. Big Frank had only one bad fault. Summer after summer he made the ensilage spoil in silos. It took the farmers several years before they discovered that Big Frank was to blame for this. Old Sam Bates, my neighbor, rose early one morning and found Big Frank sound asleep at the foot of his silo with a straw in his mouth that had some brown juice on it. Old Sam shook him and shook him but he couldn't get him wakened. Then he sniffed the straw. Corn juice! Big Frank had been boring small holes in the bottom of the silo and sucking out the juice from the ensilage. When he finally woke from his stupor he was as shamefaced as a schoolboy caught in a bad act. But the next night he did the same thing. He couldn't be broke of the habit. Old Sam Bates was mad at first; then he became curious. After tasting the juice himself, he didn't blame Big Frank anymore. In fact he slept at the foot of silos himself. That was during prohibition and fermented corn juice tasted mighty good. All the silos in the neighborhood soon had little holes bored in them.

The first years Big Frank came here, he used to move north as soon as the wheat was all in shock. Then one year he stayed to help thresh. It was a sight to see him load a rack. He heaved entire shocks into the rack and in only a few minutes had bundles piled so high that you had to crane your neck to see the top of the load. Sam Bates and I ran the rig. Old Sam kept the engine running at full speed while I squirted oil in all the cracks and crannies of the separator so the contraption wouldn't take fire. It took only two throws for Big Frank to have his rack unloaded, but the separator would still be choking and sputtering and spitting out straw and chaff from that load when Big Frank would be returning with his next. The other bundle-haulers quit as soon as they found that Big Frank didn't need any help. He could haul bundles and keep engine and separator going at full speed all the while himself. He was a bundle-slinger, that fellow!

Sam Bates, Big Frank, and I made up a three-man threshing outfit. We went from farm to farm and threshed all the wheat in the county that summer. Our little separator kept ten wagons busy hauling away the threshed grain to granaries and elevators. The next year we bought a larger separator and kept twenty wagons busy. We threshed out seven Nebraska counties that year and two in South Dakota. Big Frank became better and better all the time. He pitched bundles so fast that our separator couldn't keep up with him. Old Sam and I got our heads together and agreed that something had to be done. We'd have to get a still larger separator. The next year we bought the largest separator on the market. It was a beauty! You probably won't believe me when I tell you, but we kept thirty wagons busy that year hauling away the threshed grain. We threshed out nineteen Nebraska counties and fifteen more in the Dakotas. Big Frank had to work hard to keep up with the separator at first but he always remained in good humor. As long as there was a silo somewhere near, Big Frank was contented. He would curl up beside it at night, suck corn juice, and get a good sleep. We never threshed in a county that didn't have at least half a dozen silos.

Big Frank was a playful fellow. The second year that we had our big separator he managed to find time between loads to play "toss" with the grain-haulers. This was a sport he really enjoyed; you could hear his booming laughter three miles away. He'd pick out the heaviest hauler—usually a fat Bohemian or German weighing over two hundred pounds—take him by the scruff of the neck and throw him to the top of the strawstack. When the stack was fifty feet high it was something to see that hauler come rolling down, kicking up the straw, his legs and arms flying. Ho-ho-ho! Big Frank would roar. Once Big Frank miscalculated the distance and threw a hauler directly under the blower. Before Sam Bates could stop the engine the poor fellow had been covered up with so much straw that it took two hours to dig him out.

Big Frank got so he wanted more and more time to play "toss." One day he pitched bundles so fast into the separator that he choked it up. That hurt me. I don't know anything that hurts a separator-man's pride more than to have someone do that very thing. Of course I had to clean out the separator and, while I was doing that, Big Frank played "toss." After that, whenever Big Frank felt the urge to play come over him, he'd choke up the separator. Sam Bates and I got our heads together and agreed that something had to be done again.

The next year we bought another separator and engine and operated two rigs side by side. Big Frank drove his rack between the separators and pitched bundles first into the feeder of one, then into the feeder of the other. He had his hands really full now trying to keep up with two separators. No time for monkeyshines! Man alive, but that fellow pitched bundles. Fifty wagons were kept busy hauling away the threshed grain. In only a few weeks we had forty-two counties in Nebraska threshed out. Then we moved north into South Dakota. We threshed out the eastern part of the state and moved west. The wheat became poorer and poorer. Finally we struck a county that had suffered from drouth for several years.

"We'd better not waste our time here," I said. "Let's move north where the wheat's better."

But Big Frank felt sorry for the drouth-stricken farmers. "Let's thresh them out," he said, "and not charge them anything."

Big Frank was tenderhearted all right. He had to work a lot harder here because the wheat shocks were so far apart. At night he had to tramp forty miles sometime to find a silo. He complained that the juice didn't taste good either. One morning he failed to come home. We searched for him two days and found him lying beside a rickety silo on an abandoned farm. When he got to his feet we hardly recognized him. He had a wild look in his eyes and froth on his lips. He turned and ran as we approached. After running a distance he doubled up like a ball and rolled faster than anything we had ever seen before.

"He rolls just like a tumbleweed," one of the farmers said.

"What do you fill your silos with hereabouts?" Sam Bates asked.

"Well, since the drouth, we've been filling them with loco-weeds, prickly pear, and tumbleweeds. Ain't raised no corn in three years."

"Good Lord!" Sam Bates said.

We never saw Big Frank again. The last report we had of him said he was rolling across the prairies of Saskatchewan, Canada.

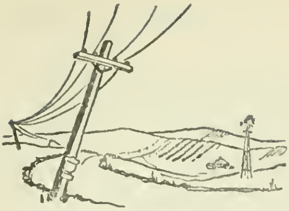
RENTER

Joseph Langland

He stood at the windmill pump watching a sparrow
fly with a length of straw locked in its beak
up to a nest piled carefully in the eave-trough,
how it shifted to meet the wind, as if to seek
an undercurrent to lift the fluttering feathers
along the gradual incline to the nest
with its furious little power, swinging over
to lay the golden straw about its breast.

From stack to eave and eave to stack it journeyed,
oblivious of the eye that marked its flight,
moved by a sense the watcher felt beholding
that simple shelter raised against the night.

He knew it must come down. Perhaps tomorrow
spring rains would wash it closer to the spout
and clog the trough; and he would climb the ladder
to grasp the soggy straw and fling it out.
The cistern must be filled, he would be saying,
hearing the sparrow scream and the dull thud
and the remembered hum of trucks with property loaded
inching their annual way along the mud.



Uncle Tige Benedict

John W. Wilson

HERE I AM eighty-one years old," Uncle Tige Benedict said. "Here I am eighty-one years old and have been living in these Turkey Creek bottoms and the country up and down the river ever since I was born. All my life I have been living here, and I have still got all my teeth but two." Uncle Tige leaned forward in his chair and spat a blob of bright-brown tobacco juice to the ground. He spat a big, round drop of juice instead of a long stream because of the gap in the front of his mouth where the two front teeth were gone. The tobacco juice hit the ground and rolled in the dry dirt and lay there round and dust-coated.

"I would have all my teeth if it hadn't been for the fight I had with Bedloe Tate when I was twenty-one years old," Uncle Tige said. "If he hadn't picked up that stick of stovewood and hit me across the mouth with it I would have had every one of my teeth to this day."

The sun was yellow with late spring warmth, the grass was green, and the trees were getting full of leaves again. Down along the creek the spring frogs croaked all day and all night, and the water moccasins crawled out on logs at midday to sun themselves. The mallard ducks had all flown north and only one or two little brown summer ducks stayed on the creek and the river.

Uncle Tige sat with the high heels of his black cowboy boots hooked in the rung of his cane-bottomed chair that leaned against the sunny side of the house. His grandchildren played about in the yard in front of him, rolling in the fresh grass and staining their clothes with green, and playing cowboy and Indian in and around the elm stumps beyond the cleared yard. Uncle Tige sat with his heels hooked, leaning against the side of the house. A broad-brimmed black hat with a torn top was on his head, and his jaws moved slowly while he chewed on a wad of tobacco.

"I have got the best teeth in the country," Uncle Tige said. "I can still chew a steak and I can damn near crack hickory nuts with my jaws, but because of that lick Bedloe Tate give me sixty years ago I cannot gnaw the meat off a squirrel leg and I can't make all my words sound as plain as I want to when I talk. If Bedloe wasn't dead now I would shore make him sweat for hitting me with that stick of stovewood."

"Grandpaw," screamed Little Annie May, the youngest of the grandchildren. "Make Bedloe stop chunkin' cow chips at me!"

"Yore brother is the spittin' image of me," Uncle Tige said. "He will grow up to be about the best man in the country. Stop chunkin' yore sister with them cow chips, Bedloe," he commanded, leaning forward in his chair, but Bedloe kept on the run after Annie May, dodging in and out among the elm stumps and pelting her with corn cobs and cow chips.

"He is hardheaded just like I used to be," Uncle Tige said, settling back in his chair. "He will do just the way he likes until somebody hits him a lick with a stick of wood or a ax handle. He ought to be beat like I used to beat his daddy. If Bedloe Tate hadn't hit me that lick sixty years ago I would likely have growed up the hardheadedest and meanest man in Crenshaw County. He had every right to give me that lick, and I'm glad he done it, if only he hadn't knocked out my two front teeth, because I miss the pure joy I used to get out of tearing the thick red meat off of a squirrel leg."

Bedloe Benedict rode his bay horse out of the elm woods and into the cleared yard. He took the horse to the barn and turned him loose in the lot. "Papa," he yelled, "let's go in the house and get some dinner."

"I'm ready," Uncle Tige answered. "I have been setting here all morning and I have not done a lick of work, but I am ready to sit down and eat just as much dinner as you. I am as good a man right now as you will ever be, and I am eighty-one years old."

"I have ridden all over this north end of the county this mornin'," Bedloe said. "I have doctored calves with screwworms from the road fence to Double Sulphur Springs up on the river. And I'm going to ride out again this evening to buy some cows from a nigger between here and town. I can do as much work in a day as you ever done in two. But you are getting old and you've earned your right to sit in the sun against the side of the house."

"I was going out this evening," Uncle Tige said. "I was going to take the rifle and go out and kill me a squirrel for supper. My eyes is as good as they ever was, and I can shoot a squirrel through the head at fifty yards, but with my two front teeth gone I cannot get any satisfaction out of eating a squirrel. But I am not going to sit in the sun and do nothing. This evening while you are gone I am going to walk up to Red Top again to ask my forgiveness of your maw and of Bedloe Tate."

"You are not going to try to walk clean to Red Top this hot afternoon, Papa," Bedloe said. "It is a mile and a half there and a mile and a half back, and that's too far for a man as old as you to walk."

"I am as good a man as I ever was," Uncle Tige said. "If it just wasn't for my two front teeth bein' gone."

Uncle Tige's boot heels clumped across the floor of the house and he sat at the table with the broad-brimmed black hat on his head while Bedloe's wife put dinner before them.

The green leaves were slick and shining in the sun. The grass was high and moist, and the earth was full of life and spring fertility. The hot sun swelled seeds in the ground and they burst, shooting spikes of corn upward while roots grew to suck at the water and food that was in the red earth.

Uncle Tige walked along the road that was dried in the sun, and the dust rose about his feet and covered his high-heeled cowboy boots. Rain water stood in ditches at the side of the road, but where the sun was shining in the open spaces between the trees the ground had dried and passing wagons had beaten the earth to dust.

Sweat rolled from underneath Uncle Tige's hatbrim while he walked. Annie May and Little Bedloe walked one on each side of him.

"I would like to see the man that says cowboy boots ain't fit to walk in," Uncle Tige said. "I would like to tell him to his face that he was a liar. Ever since I quit goin' barefoot when I was fourteen year old I have worn cowboy boots, and I will tell anybody that asks me that there is not another thing that is so comfortable on yore feet. I have worn these boots that I have on now for ten years, and I want to have them on when I die. I have told Bedloe that I want to be buried in them."

"It's mighty hot, Grandpaw," Annie May said. "Do you think you can walk all the way to Red Top and back?"

"It is the moisture in the air that makes you feel that heat," Uncle Tige said. "It is the sun drawing the moisture out of the fields and out of the leafy ground underneath the trees. That kind of heat will make you sweat, but it never hurt a soul yet. It ain't near hot enough to keep me from walking to the Red Top cemetery, where your grandmaw is buried, and where my best friend is buried.

"They lie there side by side, because when Bedloe Tate was killed that is where I asked to have him put. If he hadn't hit me that lick with that piece of stovewood you children might not have had the name of Benedict," Uncle Tige said. "Yore name might have been Tate."

Annie May and Little Bedloe walked at either side of Uncle Tige, and Bedloe carried a long stick in his hand and drew a snake track in the dust of the road as they walked toward Red Top Hill, where the Benedict burying ground had been ever since there were Benedicts in Crenshaw County.

"Bedloe Tate was my best friend," Uncle Tige said. "We was almost like sworn brothers until we both started courting the same girl. If he hadn't got mad and fought with me out behind her papa's house and hit me with that stick of stovewood I never would have married yore grandmaw, because she really loved Bedloe instead of me."

Uncle Tige wiped the sweat off his forehead with a red cotton handkerchief and put the handkerchief back in his pocket. The dust rose about his feet and covered the leather of his high-heeled cowboy boots.

"If Bedloe hadn't knocked out my two front teeth she would have gone on and married him, but after he hit me she took my side and married me the first time I asked her. When she died I had her buried here in the Benedict burying ground, and when Bedloe was killed in the train wreck I had him brought here and buried beside of her. I know they thank me for that, and I hope they have forgiven me. They have been lying there side by side for over forty years now, ever since the Spanish-American War."

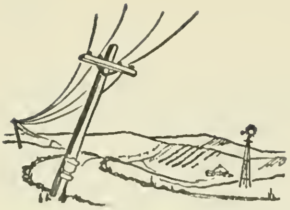
Uncle Tige walked the last few yards up the hill with Annie May and Little Bedloe at his side, and they walked through the gate to the cemetery and stood on the bare clay top of the red hill.

"Them stones there at the head of their graves was put there by me," Uncle Tige said. "I carved them with my own hands forty years ago. Bedloe Tate, one of them says, and the other one says Annie May Benedict. I am eighty-one years old," Uncle Tige said, "and I am as good a man yet as any man. But I have got a feeling that my time will come during the summer. That is why I have come up here through the hottest day we have had this spring. I wanted to take a last look at them stones that I carved with my own hands, and I wanted to look for a last time at the graves of all my relatives and ancestors, all the Benedicts that have been buried here since the first one, Buckner Benedict, come with Stephen F. Austin to Texas from Tennessee before the War for Independence. We fought in that war and all of us that was killed are buried here. We are standing on their bones. This ground is full of Benedicts."

Uncle Tige took the long, crooked stick from Little Bedloe and drew a straight line in the bare red clay. "This is where I want to lie," he said. "I want to lie here on this side of Annie May, and Bedloe will lie there on the other. They should have forgiven me by now, because I have let them lie there together for over forty years. She loved Bedloe, and that is why I have had them buried there together. And now when my time comes I want to be put in the ground on this side of her, because she was my wife, and because all Benedicts are here in this burying ground. Bedloe Tate is the only one here that is not a Benedict, and he was my best friend."

Uncle Tige drew a shorter line perpendicular to the straight line he had scratched in the hard clay. Then he drew another long line and closed up the outline of his grave. He stood on top of the hill in the afternoon with the sun beginning to get close to the treetops in the west, and he turned around to look at Annie May and Little Bedloe, who were running in and out among the grave stones throwing sticks at each other.

"It is time we were starting back to the house," he said. "It will be nearly night when we get there. It is a long walk and I have just realized today that I am an old man. I am not coming to this graveyard but once more," Uncle Tige said, "and I will not be walking when I come that time."



’Gator-Tail Steak

Frank Thone

THE little Ford truck behind us roared to a chattering standstill. Rogers, driving our car, came to a slightly less brake-wracking stop. In the posterior darkness veiled off by the Ford’s headlight, we heard a brief scuffle of feet, and then voices.

“Look out, Alex. Lordy, he’s a big one.”

“All right; I’ve got him.”

“Where’s that sack?”

Rogers reversed and backed swiftly down the road. At closer range, the Ford’s headlights cut the darkness less sharply, and in the penumbra to the rear the tall youth called Alex was dimly visible, suspending a tied gunny sack to a pole that projected from the dunnage. The sack was bulgy at the bottom, and writhed slightly.

“Cotton-mouth—’bout six feet,” said Alex laconically, getting back into his seat.

“He was lying right across the road,” supplemented Hubbell, who drove the Ford. “I nearly ran over his head and tail at the same time. Alex bagged him so quick he didn’t know what was up.” Then to me, as greenhorn, he added, “We’ve got him hung up that way so he’ll swing clear and not get bumped on the road.”

Six-foot specimens of the cotton-mouth moccasin, the most dreaded of Florida snakes, have established value as articles of barter and sale among museums, especially when they can be taken alive and uninjured. Alex, it appeared, was an adept of this mystery, and thereby a person enshrined apart in awe and terror by the country Negroes. He was also proficient in the art of taking alligators, and the principal objective of our midnight expedition to Wyckoff’s Hammock was the hide of one of these survivors of the Cretaceous. Alex could take his ’gators alive when the market demanded, and for this had been given the soubriquet "'Gator-Bo." But tonight's hunt was to be confined to the relatively tame business of shooting.

The smooth, white highway, deserted save for our two little cars, stretched away and away into the blackness, for the night was moonless and a high-hanging mist dimmed the stars. Colonnades of long-leaf pine trunks flashed into the beam of our headlights and out again. Clumps of scrub palmetto held out broad, many-fingered hands in unavailing signal or protest against our speed. Negro cabins huddled away from us in the clearings. The unrelieved flatness of the land began to give an uncomfortable feeling, as of a wrong kind of eternity.

But Rogers was able to pick landmarks even out of the sameness and the dark, for presently he slowed down at a crossroad, and the car left the hard-surfaced highway and climbed into a rutty path that ran through the pines—climbed cautiously, one wheel at a time, like a cat on a strange fence. Reduced speed on unimproved roads in Florida is a necessity, for stretches of sand drag at your wheels and in places stumps stand up in the middle of the track, eager to disembowel any low-slung machine that runs over them.

At last we paused before a farmhouse. Two taller forms and several lesser ones materialized out of the bushes, and another Ford from under a spreading live oak. The human phantoms developed as a young farmer and one of his Negro field hands, together with three or four Negro boys of assorted sizes who had wheedled or evaded their mothers at bedtime, in order to be along when something was to be shot at. Then on again into the dark.

It wasn't far now. The character of the woods changed, from the tall, unbranched, unleafed trunks of the pines to the stouter, low-branching habit of hardwoods, with considerable underbrush among them. The road suddenly came to a blind ending, and the cars pulled up side by side and parked. Behind a thin screen of bushes I could see water—black as the Styx and stretching apparently to infinity.

Rogers, Hubbell, and the young farmer lifted out the sections of the portable boat that formed the main part of the truck's freight, and began to bolt them together. Alex looked to his rifle, and then took off most of his clothes. The boat was ready in few enough seconds to do credit to the engineer corps, and launched on the Styx without ceremony. The young farmer took his place in the stern with a paddle. Alex fixed an electric jack-light to the front of his disreputable hat, and stood in the waist, with his rifle. They shoved off, quietly, so as not to disturb the alligators that might be swimming or floating near by. Alex extinguished his light, and the skiff and its crew of two vanished utterly. Once or twice when Alex spoke, giving directions to his oarsman, his voice startled me with its nearness. He could hardly have been a hundred feet away, but so far as we on shore could see he might have been as many miles. Then he began to show his light at intervals, like a giant firefly, shining it on the water to pick up the green-gilded eye of the reptile he was stalking.

Apparently 'gators were not plentiful in the Styx, for the boat plied up and down for many minutes while we marked its course by the flashings of the light. So we gave up watching, and joined the Negro boys in a humbler hunt for frogs along the shore. The field hand who had come out with the farmer, it appeared, was a barbecue cook of parts, and a feast was to follow the hunt. He already had fish of his own catching; now he wanted frog legs.

In the midst of our preoccupation with this meat-hunting, Alex's voice cut through the darkness. "There he is. Easy, now." A short silence, while the light held steady on a spot in the water. Then the fire-jet and bark of the rifle, followed by the splash of a paddle plied in a great hurry. "Grab him before he sinks. Quick, or we'll never get him. . . . There! Help me get him into the boat."

The skiff reappeared in the narrow circle of light cast by our lanterns and flares. Belly-up on its bottom was the dead alligator, corpse-white in that unnatural aspect, its jaw clamped in a last disdainful grin. We lifted it out on shore and turned it over. Alex's bullet had cut a section out of the top of its head, just back of the eyes, flicking away most of the little brain that an alligator has.

"We need one more," said Alex. "A little one."

So the boat vanished once more out on the Styx. This time the hunt was briefer; there was apparently a better assortment of small and medium sizes in stock in the dark water. The second victim measured only a little over three feet in length. That concluded the shooting; we were not bag-hunting. Alex and his companion fell to work skinning their catches, and the Negro kindled his fire and began frying frog legs and fish.

When the fresh hides had been rolled up and stowed in the truck, Alex turned again to the white carcass of the larger alligator and began cutting off its tail. Curious to learn the reason for this apparently gratuitous mutilation, I squatted alongside and watched the operation.

Having detached this powerful organ, at once the alligator's propeller and hunting weapon, Alex made a lengthwise cut through the sheath of transverse muscle that encased it, laying bare a massive column of white muscle running down its whole length. Out of this he cut a section a foot or so long, a solid cylinder of smooth, white meat.

"What's that for?" I asked, unable to contain my curiosity.

"'Gator-tail steaks," he answered. I must have looked incredulous. "Sure," he argued. "They're good, too. Just wait and see."

He sliced his cylinder of meat into neat cutlets, hacking through the vertebrae with a scout ax. He laid his stock out on a clean board which he had conjured up from somewhere, and hammered each piece hard, in the time-honored round-steak style. Then he relinquished them to the cook, and announced that he was going swimming.

Swimming at midnight in a 'gator-infested lake was hardly a fascinating prospect for a greenhorn; but all the rest of the party were already shucking off garments; so there was nothing to do but follow their example. Alex and the young farmer, having had least on to begin with, were in the water first; they swam as well as alligators themselves, and made several excursions into the engulfing darkness beyond the light-circle of the campfire, seemingly unconcerned about reptilian teeth. A 'gator won't attack a man anyway, they asserted, unless the brute is old and crazy. I swam more conservatively, sometimes turning over to float on my back, for a look to see how supper was progressing. Once I saw something that started me back toward shore in a hurry, but Alex swam out to investigate, and reported only a shining bubble and a floating stick. These, plus my imagination, had equalled the eye and snout of an alligator.

At last we were told that the meat was ready: a Friday feast representing the three cold-blooded divisions of the vertebrates, fish, batrachians, and reptiles. The 'gator-tail steaks looked like rather thick slices of fried eggplant and they tasted somewhere between frog legs and chicken. After a little initial reluctance had been driven back inside by the first bite, I ate rather more than my share.

High Tension

Harry G. Huse

NOW that this feller Taber has gone back East there to Ohio and has had a chanct to study the thing over I guess he'll begin to see the joke too.

"Maybe after while he'll understand me laughing, and'll set down and drop me a postcard. A pitcher postcard showing the grounds of that Normal School, and saying he found the Missus and younguns doing first-rate and glad to see him.

"But maybe he won't neither. You can't never tell about them drylanders. They wasn't well-balanced, I never thought, take them as a general class. Didn't hardly none of them have what you would really call a sense of humor. Take 'Limp' Adams, for instance. Laid into his wife and kids with an axe and then blowed off the top of his own head with a shotgun. All that ruction 'cause he couldn't raise wheat on land where the government had figgered he ought to. Or that old-maid dressmaker, Miss Lucas, from Indiana. The one they still got up there to Warm Springs. Laying out on the rimrock in Bird Coulee all one afternoon, hoping for a rattlesnake to bite her! All tired out, she claimed, 'cause the wind wouldn't never stop blowing!

"Or you take Taber hisself, for that matter. I guess he was the worst of the lot. Like when I used to see him, evening after evening, standing over there on his place with his hat off and his head up in the air, talking to them poles as if they was human beings or God Almighty or something.

"A funny flock, the whole kit and boodle, and the country, I say, is well shut of the most of them.

"I told Old Dave Hilger, in to the Stockmen's National, how it would be, when they first started coming. 'Listen here,' says I, 'they'll ruin the country and won't do theirselves no good neither!' That's what I told him clean back there at the beginning.

"Old Dave just leaned back in his old cowhide chair and give me the haw-haw.

" 'Ed,' says he, 'you're a damn old back number. You been living out on that ranch of yours for the last twenty-five years—you and that Injun woman—just raising sheep and letting progress pass you by. Wake up, Ed!' says he. 'Something *to* this dry-farming!'

" 'Dave,' says I, 'this railroad and government and land agent hot air's got you going. Sure they can dry-farm some parts of Montana, but not here. They're slopping over when they think they can farm here. Thirty Mile Bench is the same as it's always been, and that's sub-semi-arid. It's going to stay that way regardless of these big-mouthed claim locators and highfaluting experiment stations. Maybe they can dust-mulch and summer fallow,' I says, 'and raise a measly crop of wheat some places. But not out on old Thirty Mile! The Lord made that bench to grow grass for sheep, and that's all it's fit for!'

" 'Hell, Ed,' he come back at me, 'you're sore, that's what ails you. These new pioneers of ours are taking your range, and there won't be any more free grass for your woolies. You better bring in some poor relatives and a lot of dumb herders and grab a homestead for each of them. Climb on the band wagon,' he says. 'The pastoral days are over. From now on it's wheat!'

" 'Maybe I am sore,' says I, 'but not sore enough to try to raise wheat on one good rain, a couple of blizzards, and three dew-falls a year. You never yet see people tackle a new proposition without slopping over. Half the homesteads that'll be took ain't fit for farming. Let them keep away from Thirty Mile Bench and stick to the sections that gits fourteen inches rainfall a year. Far as my sheep are concerned,' I says, 'I've leased the Reserve for three years. I'll give these new pioneers of yours that long to git their bellies full. I'll stay on my own band wagon, and watch this other one wabble along and break down!'

"And I was right, except that it's taken five years 'stead of three. The trouble with these scissorbills was they didn't know when they was licked.

"Like this feller Taber.

"He was a good sample of old Dave's new class of pioneers. We got all kinds and mostly queer ones. They put me in mind of converts at a good rousing 'Come to Jesus' meeting. They'd been a lot of strong preaching and hallelujahs in all the magazines and newspapers. 'Three hundred and twenty acres free,' and 'Strike your roots in the soil,' and 'Build your Little Gray Home in the West.' That kind of stuff.

"It stirred up all the unsuccessful and dissatisfied folks in the country. You can guess what kind of sinners come to the Mourners' Bench and wallered in the straw.

"There was sharp-faced women stenographers from Illinois, coming out in pairs maybe, and filing side by side, with their shacks just across the line, so's they could stick their heads out their windows and call good morning. That is before they got to heaving stove lids at each other. And dirt farmers, with manure on their shoes, and round, fat wives and a half-dozen children, trying to make theirselves believe this was going to be another Nebrasky or Kansas. And grocery storekeepers with notches wore in their fingers from breaking off the string after they'd wrapped up a quarter's worth of sugar and asked what else today.

"And then there was this feller Taber.

"I'd guess him at about thirty-two when he first come here. Nothing special about him you'd pay much attention to. Just a common-looking feller, quiet-like, with glasses and soft hands and a partly bald forehead. After he'd been here a while he got kind of stooped, 'cept when he'd think about it and straighten up. He got into a habit of setting his jaw and throwing his head back, like he was one of my old bucks and his skimpy forelock was a pair of horns. He got to doing that more and more as things went along. I blamed it on his looking up so much at them poles.

"He'd been a teacher in a normal school back East, and he was engaged to be married when he come out here. That was why he come. She was only about twenty. One of his pupils back at the school.

"It's hard to explain what'd happened to him. Looking at it one way it don't hardly seem to make sense. He'd been one of these kind of timid young fellers that gits along better in school than any place else. Hadn't never played much with other fellers or had nothing to do with girls. Didn't have much stomach for things that was give-and-take and rough-and-tumble.

"He'd just kind of drifted into teaching at the same school where he'd studied, and'd never stopped to size hisself up until he met her. She'd sat in his classes for some time before he'd noticed her. Then something come over him all to once, and from then on he couldn't keep his eyes off her. First thing he knew she was staying after class to talk to him, and after while he was walking with her evenings in the moonlight, under the big old trees. She was a pretty little thing with light hair and round blue eyes and a pink complexion, when she first come here.

"He told me a lot about her and him, there in the beginning, before she come, when he was living by hisself and was hard up for someone to talk to.

"When he found out, he says, that she had give him her love, a great waking-up come over him, 'most like he'd felt for the first time what it took to be a man. I wasn't listening very close the night he opened up and told me the most about it. That kind of talk always did make me tired. Telling me about the first time she kissed him! There's a lot I don't remember. But you could tell she'd set him loonier than a sheepherder. He said something about finding he had unworthy offerings to lay at her altar. He meant he was ashamed of so far having made his life work training a bunch of young girls how to be schoolteachers. The miracle, he says, was that being so little of a man she had come to love him. Now that he'd woke up and had her by his side nothing could stop him. I could have told him something about having a woman on your hands if I'd of been a mind to.

"He'd give up his job and come out in June, soon as school was over. I guess there in the beginning she thought it was real romantic too. She was to follow and join him when he got his place picked out and his shack built.

"He must of got a shock when he first got off the train and seen the country. None of the homesteaders had really understood what was meant by boundless prairies. Nary a tree for forty miles in any direction. The only thing that sticks up out of the benchland higher'n a sheep's back is old Chimney Butte, and it's plumb barren.

"I guess he wished he'd stayed back home schoolteaching. But maybe not. The town was full of other folks like him that hadn't never seen a thousand acres all together in one piece, let alone a hundred thousand. They was all spouting about the new agricultural era and this foxy principle of summer fallow. The notion seemed to have got out that all a person had to do out here to be a rancher was live a wild, free life and ride around on horseback.

"Things was pretty well picked over time he got here. But that didn't stop the land agents. They was still able to show him plenty of places. Some of them was only six, seven miles from town. But he come clean over here and took this piece that joins me.

"I wasn't able to figger out why until he told me. The old 'lectric transmission line from the Falls come along his south boundary, and swung off across the corner of my place to the foothills. He thought things would be less lonesome account of it running along his boundary.

"It wasn't so much the poles because God knows they're lonesomer looking than nothing would be. They're set in threes, fastened together at the top with a long crossarm, and the wires hanging off big crockery insulators at the end and drooping along to the next set of poles. Whenever I look at them they put me in mind of a gallows. But maybe I got myself kind of soured on them worrying the wire might break and drop down into a bunch of my sheep.

"It wasn't the poles so much, Taber says, but the thing they stood for. 'High tension!' he says to me. 'Twenty-five thousand volts up there in those slender wires! Energy—power—and life!' says he. It always made me kind of tired when he'd talk like that. 'Lonesome poles,' I 'member he said, 'standing there year after year on a lonesome prairie! Standing through wind and rain and snow with their arms 'round each other's shoulders to help carry the load! Like a man,' says he, 'most like he was talking to hisself, 'and his woman, and later his children—living here on these bleak acres, raising wheat to feed the world!'

"If I'd of knowed him better then I'd of come right out and told him that a woman that wasn't used to this country was more likely to be like one of the drooping wires.

"It was while he was building his house and digging his well and putting up fence and waiting for her to come, I guess, that he got into the habit of what you might call hobnobbing with them poles. He was gitting some idea, I guess, of what him and her was going to be up against. It probably was lonesome when a man wasn't used to it. Sometimes after the wind's been blowing a couple of weeks even a sheepherder will git kind of moony. And then after having somebody to tell him what to do all his life it must of scared Taber a little to find he was his own boss.

"Anyway he got to talking to them poles.

"I was coming by one night 'bout sundown, and stopped in to visit with him. He'd been painting his house, and was standing by the corner with the brush in his hand, looking off to the west. There was spots all over his clothes and his shoes, and a big smear of paint almost covering his chin.

" 'Millen,' he says to me, motioning off over the prairie, 'just look at that!'

"I looked but all I could see was the sun going down and that line of poles.

" 'You've been living here too long,' he says. 'You've lost the feel of this country and the beauty of it.'

" 'Just look at it!' he says. 'The prairie deep purple, and the sky dull, flaming red, and striding straight at us,' he says, as if he was telling it to someone that had weak eyes and couldn't see, 'striding straight at us the triple poles of the transmission line. Gaunt sillooettes,' or something like that he called them, 'against a glowing sky!'

" 'It's lonesome,' he goes on, like he was talking to hisself, 'God! But it's lonesome! But it's fine too!' he says. 'She'll understand!'

" 'If I was you,' I says, 'I'd of built my house a little further to one side. If one of them wires was to break in a sleet storm or blow down in a hard wind there'd be trouble.'

"Well, she come out in the fall, and he met her in town and they was married. And then he brought her out to the place that he'd got ready. He'd fixed it up right tidy, with the house and stable painted, and a dinky little picket fence with a swinging gate.

"He'd gone and give it a name. He got that idea, I guess, from some of the other fool dry-landers. There was a feller on the way in to town that'd set out a couple dozen sick-looking cottonwoods 'round his house and called the place 'Prairie Grove.' And another'd put up a big, hopeful sign on his barn, 'Golden Acres.' Taber'd kept right up with the procession. He'd stuck three two-by-fours in the ground, like the posts of the transmission line, with a board nailed flat ag'in them at the top like it was the crossarm, and on it he had printed in big black letters the words 'High Tension.' I wanted to ask him why he didn't put on the rest—'Danger! Keep Away! 25,000 Volts!'

"Now that Taber'd got his wife and his house and his stable and his sign up by the gate, he set to breaking. There was funny sights out on the bench them days. Lady schoolteachers wearing overalls and digging post holes. Dry-goods clerks in yeller khaki pants trying to milk these wild-eyed range cows. And Missouri farmers with long whiskers snapping in the wind.

"But the best of all was Taber plowing. The sod was tough and a little rocky. The breaking plow bucked like a half-broke broncho. Taber'd bought hisself four mismatched horses. He'd got one mare that wanted to trot all the time, and a roan gelding whose natural gait was a mile a hour. What with hanging onto the whip and the lines and the handles of the plow and trying to keep his feet on the ground, he'd git hisself into a heavy perspiration.

"He'd scarce be able to drag one foot past the other when he come up from the stable at night after doing the milking. But he'd stand there by the house for a minute and straighten out all his troubles by looking at the transmission line. He didn't git much help that way from his wife whose first name, I forgot to say, was Bessie. Bessie was running into her own troubles inside the house, what with alkali water and no conveniences like she'd been used to and nobody 'round all day to talk to. She didn't seem able to pick up courage from looking at the poles her own self; so he had to git enough for the both of them.

"I guess she minded the inconveniences and the lonesomeness more'n ever before they got through that first winter. It was a stinger. Snow there for a while 'most up to the tops of the windows.

"Her and him had a good chanct to git real well acquainted them long days inside the house. He hadn't nothing to do but the chores out to the barn. He'd dug a path to go along from the back door out to the hen-house and the stable. He'd stop sometimes when it was twenty below zero and a strong wind blowing, and stand there, gawking off along them singing wires. When he got so cold he couldn't stand it he'd go back inside the house.

"While we was near neighbors I never really did git acquainted with Bessie. My own woman is a full-blood Blackfoot, and now that she's got old and heavy she ain't sociable. So we didn't visit them and they never come to see us. But I'd see Mrs. Taber sometimes at the kitchen door, throwing out dishwater or out in the yard hanging out clothes, and to look at her, kind of bewildered and droopy, it didn't seem like she belonged in this country.

"Well, starting early spring everybody went back to breaking. It made me mad to see them turning under all that good grass. They sure spoiled the looks of the country.

"Taber'd got a little handier at his plowing, and didn't wear hisself out so. He needed his strength for cheering up Bessie after he got in from the field nights. She was fixing to celebrate their anniversary by having a baby. I guess it didn't make her any handier with the housework or more cheerful 'bout dry-land life. I'd think about that sign of Taber's. I wondered if maybe they wouldn't call the youngun '25,000 Volts.'

"Well, things traveled along 'bout the way I'd figgered. Only not quite so fast. This dry-farming here turned out to be a pretty come-on game for suckers. It was the summer fallow that done it. Half your land's in wheat while the other half's idle. Two years' moisture, they figgered, would raise one year's crop. After a man's grain burned out and good sense told him to quit he'd keep right on plugging. He'd spent so much time cultivating next year's ground he hated to give up. The weather took a hand at fooling folks, 'cause we had more rain than usual the third year. Things grew pretty well, and it set everyone crazy. 'Bout that time Bessie had another baby.

"Next year the wheat got just about high enough to make good pasture when the dry weather hit it. A lot of folks starved out and quit the following winter. Bessie wanted to go and Taber had a hard time staying. Her folks'd started writing her letters 'bout coming back. She'd read the letters to him. After that he'd have to stand out there in the yard a long time feeding hisself the full strength of the current.

"By spring half the homesteads was empty and it looked like there was going to be a future for sheep. But the tougher ones like Taber still hung on. Things started out fine for them. We had a wet spring for this country and the wheat was green and growing. Taber had a grin from ear to ear. He'd got to be a reg'lar farmer now. His hands was all tough and hard and horny. He was a devil at working.

"But that wet spring was just Thirty Mile's way of fooling the suckers. Pretty soon the wind commenced to blow. Once it started, it kept at it steady. My old woman put a wash out on the line one morning and the first clothes she took out of the basket was dry time she got the last ones hung out. By June the wheat had all curled up and died. Folks picked up then and got out in earnest.

"Things must of got pretty rasping then over to the Tabers, 'cause she up one day and left him. She'd got a letter from home with a check in it and she just packed up her things and took the kids and went on back to her folks in Ohio.

"He told me something 'bout it a couple nights later when I dropped over to visit with him. He'd been weed-skinning all day on that cussed summer fallow. I come on him sitting in his little kitchen in the half-dark, looking out through the window. He'd et his supper and the dishes was still on the table along with some more left over from breakfast and dinner. When I hollered and he turned and saw me he got up and come outside.

" 'Well,' he says, trying to act cheerful, 'I'm a bachelor for awhile. Bessie and the children have gone home for a visit.'

" 'Hmmm,' I says.

" 'Gone back,' he says, 'to see her folks. I guess it's been pretty lonesome out here for her.'

" 'They coming back soon?' I asks him.

" 'I guess not,' he says.

" 'You aiming to stay a spell longer your own self?' I asks him.

" 'I got to stay,' he says; 'I've got a sign!'

" 'A sign?' says I, 'You mean the one out there by the gate?'

" 'No,' he says. 'You don't understand. A real sign. A symbol!'

"Then he goes on to tell me what he means.

"Seems like the night Bessie got her letter telling her to come home he was all upset about it and didn't know what to do. There was a chanct, her folks said, for him to git back his old job. He wanted to go and yet he didn't. He figgered there was still a future for the country. I could of told him that there was, but it was sheep.

"Somehow it seemed to him, he says, like she hadn't cared for him as much as she was able. Anyway not like he had thought she was going to there at first. Things hadn't worked out right between them. He'd got it into his head that it was because he was a failure. 'I couldn't go back with her,' I 'member he says, 'defeated. And I couldn't bear to have her go back alone.'

" 'You see,' he says after while, 'I'm still in love with Bessie.'

" 'Yeah?' says I, and I 'member thinking to myself there was worse things than being hitched to a Blackfoot that got fat and satisfied to sit in a corner, grunting.

" 'Yes,' says he.

"Well, she'd been dead set on going, and he had to make up his mind. She went to bed crying, and he come out in the yard.

" 'You know,' he says to me, 'how some evenings the color stays for a long time in the west. Well, it was that way this night,' he says. 'There was still light along the horizon. I wanted to go worse'n I wanted to stay. I stood there wrestling with myself,' he says, 'looking at those three poles that stand over by the fence corner. They were black against that band of light. And as I looked what do you think, all of a sudden, they became?'

"'When I squint at them,' I says, 'all I can see is a gallows.'

"'No, no!' he says. 'Not a gallows! Three crosses, Millen! Three crosses! Calvary!'

"So that's why he'd stayed while Bessie'd gone on back home.

"Well, now she was gone, Taber kept right on tending his summer fallow. We had a lot of wind that summer. I'd look over there to his place sometimes, and wouldn't hardly be able to see him for the dust blowing.

"When planting time come in the fall he put in another crop of winter wheat. He spent all the money he had left for seed. It looked like maybe he would starve to death over the winter. He'd already got pretty well gaunted-up from eating his own cooking. There wasn't any work he could do on his own place during the cold weather. So when one of my men left I offered Taber a job winter-herding.

"He turned his horses out and come over here and lived in the bunkhouse with the other herders. He had his living and I paid him thirty-five dollars a month beside. He might just as well stayed on during the spring and let his wheat grow. But soon's the frost was out of the ground he quit and went back to gitting ready next year's summer fallow.

"Then one day I see a little piece in the Falls paper that made me chuckle. It was such a good one it seemed like I'd ought to show it to Taber. He didn't take no paper now and wasn't likely to see it. It was too good a joke to keep to myself. But somehow I didn't git around to tell him. I guess I didn't exactly know how he'd take it.

"Well, we had rain, and Taber's wheat started growing. It come along nice through May and June until it was almost in the milk. Dry weather set in in July, but only partly hurt it. There was enough sap left in the stalks to make it fill. Some of the kernels was small and shrivelled, but there'd be a crop all right.

"Taber quit weed-skinning, and started patching up an old binder. He went in town and brought hisself out a load of twine.

"'Bout that time he got a jolt from Bessie. Maybe her folks had put her up to it. She throwed things square up to him. She still cared for him, she said, but couldn't much longer with him so faraway. He'd have to do something or she had a right to be free.

"When he told me 'bout it he was laughing. 'Look, Millen!' he says, reaching over the fence, and pulling off a half-dozen heads of grain. He rubs them in his hands and blows away the chaff. 'Look!' says he, holding out that little handful of wrinkled kernels. 'Wheat!' says he. 'Stored-up energy! Power! Life!'

" 'Sure,' I says, 'and how about your missus?'

" 'This solves things,' he says. 'Don't you see? This is success. After I've harvested my crop I'll go back there and spend the winter. We'll come back in the spring, and start new again!'

"But Thirty Mile had a trick up her sleeve he hadn't seen yet.

"Taber got his binder tinkered up and started cutting. The wheat was dead ripe now, and he couldn't stop to shock it. He just let the bundles lay.

"He'd been cutting three, four days, and was about a third finished. Then late one hot afternoon there come up a bunch of clouds. They kept gitting thicker and thicker in the west until they was a nasty purple. Then they got all curly on top, and down underneath they turned kind of pasty white.

"I watched them from my yard until I knowed what was coming. Then I struck out for Taber who was driving down the side of the field toward the house. I didn't go far before he heard me yelling. He got his horses unhooked from the binder all right and just about to the barn when the hail struck him. He was battered up a little before he got to shelter with the horses and I got peppered good and proper running back to my house.

"Well, those clouds just opened up and let us have it. There was a lot of wind back of that hail. I thought it would pound the shingles right off the roof.

"The storm only lasted 'bout ten minutes. But when it quit the stones was laying a couple of inches deep all over the ground, and things was scattered 'round every which way from the wind.

"I went out in my yard and poked 'round there, cold and shivery. I see Taber come out of his barn, and walk over to his wheat. The standing grain was beat down like a couple thousand sheep had tromped it. The bundles too was all tore up and pounded flat in the mud.

"I was busy setting things to rights 'round my place until evening. Then I thought I'd mosey over and see how Taber was gitting along. I'd seen him walking back and forth across his field with his head down for 'bout an hour. Then he'd quit and gone into the house.

"When I come along to his place I see where the wind had played some devilment there too. The dinky little picket fence was tore up and laying flat on the ground. The gate was tore off its hinges, and upended with the points sticking in the mud. All that was left of his sign, far as I could see, was one of the two-by-four uprights.

"It was just about dark then, and there was still a chilly wind blowing. There was a ragged strip of black cloud laying a couple hands high off the prairie in the west. Below that was some sick-looking light where the sun'd gone down.

"I come quiet 'round the corner of the house, and then I see Taber. He was standing underneath the wires with his back half turned. He was twisting something 'round his left wrist.

"He stoops down and picks up something from the ground. He kind of braced hisself. Then he threw back his head with that funny way he had. Before I knew what he was up to he pulled back his right arm and let fly. I see a rock go flying up into the air, dragging a long tail of wire behind it. It arched up over that transmission line, and fell 'bout halfway back to the ground. It brought up short, dangling there. I see Taber's left arm jerk up over his head.

"He just stood there 'thout moving. Then, slow-like, he put his other hand up to his head. I made some noise, and he seen me. He just stood there.

"I says 'Good Evening,' and moves over toward him. He just stood there with his arm still up over his head. He'd had to use barb wire, and where it went round his wrist it'd tore through the hide and cut him. Some blood was running down his wrist.

"I reached up to git the wire unfastened.

" 'Look out!' he says. 'Don't touch it!'

" 'Hmmm,' I says. 'You ain't kept up with the news. This line's dead since they put through the new one. I see it in the Falls paper. There ain't been no current 'long here since back in May. They'll be 'long here 'most any day now, taking down the poles.'

"I untwisted the wire from his wrist, and the rock dropped to the ground.

"Then I looked down, and had to laugh right out loud. 'Haw-haw,' says I. 'Haw-haw! That's a good one, Taber!'

"Well, we just stood there, looking at each other. It kind of made me fidget.

"He looked at me sharp, then down where I was pointing. It was that sign of his with the letters all smeared up with mud.

" 'There it is, Taber,' I says, still laughing. 'There it is.'

"He read the words out loud, slow-like—'High Tension.' Then he laughed too but awful hollow and funny.

" 'Yes, there it is!' he says, and turns and walks away.

"Well, Taber pulled out next day for Ohio, and left me here raising sheep. The grass ain't been so much hurt as you might think by all the breaking. It'll come back time the fences blow down.

"And maybe after Taber's been back there a while longer and's had a chanct to think things over he'll see the joke and drop a line to his old neighbor.

"Anyways I just had to laugh right out."

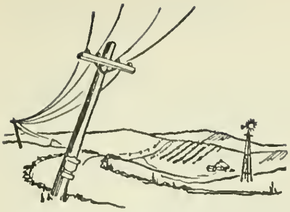
EAST WIND

David Cornel DeJong

Sing hoarse with the grackles, or sweet
Among green melons, and follow
The reckonings of noon's blue
Calculus of light and shadow.

Beneath the sun—that feaster—glide,
Humming the bees onto honey;
Over calves, up-tilting beetles
From the clover, pert and funny.

Then rock all the cocky gables of
Towns to sleep at mid-morn—later.
Along haughty rivers disport
So that slow bass swim greater.
Down athwart the hills, tunnel through trees,
And over again for a strumming,
Announcing to rippling acres
Thunder's grave westward drumming.



God Made Little Apples

Meridel Le Sueur

YEAH . . . yeah," Lars said. "Arrested . . . well, I'll be——"

"What is it?" the women clattered from the kitchen like geese.

Lord . . . so many women he had! He saw their fair fat flesh steaming in the morning kitchen, with the broth and coffee. "Well," he said, "what do you know? The old devil. That's the way for a man to act now after harvest."

"What is it?" Helga, his wife, said, turning her bright face. And the wizened face of his mother looked over the coffeepot, and there were the round laughing faces of his three big girls.

"It's Grandpa," Emily, the oldest, said. "Oh, Grandpa has spent his harvest money."

"Oh," Grandma said, "that old codger!"

"Yas," Lars said, swatting his huge thigh, "yas, the old man's in jail in Hastings—smack in jail and wants me to come get him out. There's a man for you. First harvest in four years and there goes the harvest money! Ho, ho; ha, ha!"

"Tch, tch, tch!" Grandma said, but she couldn't help smiling.

"Now, Helga, you'd have some complaining to do proper if I did that in the fall. It's a fair day for deviltry. Got a mind to go after him and stop and see Mrs. Potter I courted forty years ago, and would have married her, too."

"Go on!" Helga said, flicking him with a towel.

"Tell us, Pa . . ."

"You're too young," he laughed, listening to the clucks, the warm talk of the women. He thought, "One good season can make a man feel good. Haven't been across the river for years. Wonder what Effie Potter looks like now; she used to be a sweet apple-faced gal for certain. Suppose I had married her." But he looked at Helga, warm as bread, opulent as his fields this year, mother of his seven children. No drouth in her.

And now the land, the weather, was with you again; the barn was full of hay.

"I'll go with you," Helga said. "The canning's done; I haven't had a vacation . . ."

He didn't know why he was set against her going. He wanted to get away from her, from them all.

"I'll get my things and go along," Grandma said. "I know how to handle these things. Every year at harvest . . ."

"No, you don't!" Lars said. "This is a man's affair. I think I'll join the old coot for a nip."

"Lars!" Helga said, and he saw her anxious eyes, blue as his mother's, and the great braids wound on her head, white now, as the snow of Sweden. "Mama," Helga said, "have you got the harvest money?"

"No," the old lady said, grinning in her empty gums, "he's the man of the family . . ."

"Twice a year," Helga said, "all his life, roaring drunk at seeding, at harvest!"

"You see what I tell you," Lars said, "you don't appreciate me."

"Lars," Helga said, "you're spoiled."

"How will we get him out?" the old lady said.

"I'll go get him out; I'll go this very morning. The cows are milked; the haying's done." And he thought, "I can go across the river. Why, I haven't driven over there in nearly forty years. I haven't seen Effie since her wedding day . . ."

He felt caught inside his life, inside the warm kitchen, in the golden hair of his women, his six girls. And he felt enormous, like a man who has been sweating at fighting in too small a space, a six-room house, ninety acres, where you plowed your sweat, and thought, riding all day on the sand, that it was like the fine hair of your Scandinavian women. Suddenly, he was greatly excited.

He rose in his chair, roaring for his good shirt, his Sunday shirt. "Iron it!" he cried, and stood in the kitchen roaring.

The women scampered like geese when he roared like that. He had on his clean shirt . . . Helga cut his hair around the edges . . . He pared his big nails.

"You're dressing up like your wedding day," Helga twitted.

"Might meet a brace of apple-cheeked gals," he laughed, and she made a face at him.

Then he got into the car, without a pig to market, without a bag of grain, free to cross the river into the fair, fall, country hills. Tiny villages, bearing the mark of men like himself who had come from his own country, seamen like his ancestors, with fierce scarred faces, tight curls and earrings.

He looked back and saw the girls waving, saw Helga by the door, and her kiss had meant, Do not get drunk. For a moment he wondered what is it—good years, bad years, your life, the sun shining down, women's faces laughing, a picture of your mother in a full skirt, mortgages making a ghost of the spoons you ate off? He waved, and turned the car down the road towards the river, through the village, across the bridge, up the river road and seemed to be driving into his childhood, his mother beside him, as she clucked to the horses and held him close in her great skirts so he wouldn't fall. In the tiny mirror of the Ford he laughed, roared with laughter, seeing his thick pelt of a neck and one eye looking from the burned laps of skin pitted like the sand from his own hills; and the eye kept looking at him and made him laugh.

Memory lay like a thick mosaic all around him, a substance sweet and heavy. The wrecked and ruined houses, and the shapes of the strong men who had lived in them, thirty years before. There was the house of Strawberry Pratt, one of the first lumbermen. The house was empty now and the shutters flapping. The sawmills gone, the villages removed, a few white houses looking like New England, and some summer tourists. You passed cars with canoes on top and motorboats in trailers, and summer bedding and cookstoves piled in them. All along the river the old men stooped in the melon patches. And there was the store of old Sam. He could beat you out of your mother-in-law. By Heavens, he remembered the time Sam beat him out of a fighting cock, and he came away without the cock and with a couple of old hens not worth the powder to blow them up. Old Sam was dead now.

As he drove into the lift of the hills toward Effie's he thought he remembered certain trees, turns in the road, and a curious excitement made him drive faster. Her husband was dead now and she lived alone on the hill, her son gone away. He saw the barns empty. What harm was there in going to see Effie? Yet he looked down the road to see if anyone was behind him. An old Collie came out to meet him after he had passed the windmill and the cream house, and a big rooster strutted past the wheels, and Lars laughed as if he had nothing to do but go traipsing around the country visiting old loves.

When he stood by the door looking into the cool, dark summer kitchen, flavorsome, smelling of piccalilli, and—did he imagine it?—the lavender perfume Effie used to use, he grinned sheepishly to feel his heart hammering as he waited for an answer to his knock. But he wasn't prepared for the woman who strode from the darkness, peering at him through the sunlight as if from the grave. She was wearing an old hat and the face of Effie as he remembered her hung like a dream in the layers of old flesh.

"What do you want?" she said, peering blindly, and the dead bird, hanging with dead claws to the hat, seemed to see him more brightly.

"Howdy," Lars said, and knew that she didn't remember him nor ever would. She giggled and thrust the hat on her rats, and he smelled beer on her breath. "I thought maybe you had a calf to sell."

"No," she said, "the barn is empty. I tell you—" She went on with the garrulousness of people who live alone, as if continuing a conversation she had been having many years in a lonely house with herself. "I tell you I got my troubles. Did my only son have a right to leave his poor old mother?"

He stood awkwardly in the door, the sun shining on his back, and the odorous dark out of which the old woman loomed going over him like a litany of disaster, over everything that she had lost, remembering every lost thing, stove, chickens, child, husband, chair, cow, bird; taken by flood, famine, cholera, graft, or natural decay and rot. Her mind was like a huge and fabulous junkyard filled with the idiocy of inanimate things to be lost, maimed, forgotten, ruined, until he could stand it no longer. But she didn't want him to go now, seeing his hungry startled listening, and she followed him to the car, clinging to its side, thrusting her ruined face at him.

And when he drove away, leaving her on the stone threshold still counting up disasters, he felt sick and wanted a drink, and drove away fast to Sam's tavern and drank down two cool draughts of beer, before he felt good again, and bought two hot melons which he thought he would eat for lunch. The day was bright, lying under the prismatic glass of sky, and the blue mist fell in the shadows of the stacks and followed each fattening Thanksgiving turkey, and he filled his pipe and began to laugh, thinking of the old man in the cooler.

Afton was a village named by Scotchmen. It was a nice neat village with cows grazing in the lowlands by the river, an old hotel he had known as a child, little farms and neat English houses. Many of these people had been seamen like his own, had come at the same time, but he didn't know them or they him. Only ten miles from his house and he didn't know them from Adam. He had a feeling for going in and asking them, "What do you know? How do you find it? What's up? How's tricks?" What would you say? "Well, I've been living for sixty years ten miles from you. Ain't it time we got acquainted?"

He stopped at the lunchroom and sat on a stool. An old woman came down the steps from the kitchen. She said in a queer voice, "What do you want?" and it sounded as if it were coming from a throat caught in a noose. He looked at her and saw where her whole throat had been burned, shooting right up beneath her eyes. She brought him some homemade cake and whipped cream, and he ate, wondering how it would go with the beer. And he still felt hungry, but he paid her, said good day, and went out. The village street lay quiet, empty. He got into the car and took to the road that went now into the hills, a dirt road, lined with birches and grapevines and gold and purple flowers of harvest blooming, goldenrod and niggertoe.

He drove along slowly, smoking, putting one foot up on the door to cool it off; the lizzy got pretty warm on the hills. He drove slowly because of the love he had for looking at all the tiny farms on the hills, seeing the grains all cut, the corncribs full, everything looking neat; but he could see how they clung to the hills by the skin of their teeth, too. He could read the farms like a book. It was very interesting as he went along. He could see the signs of struggle. "Bees . . . now they are trying bees," he thought; "they think they'll make out with bees." Then someone had tried raising peanuts. "You can't do that here," he thought; "they'll find that out." And ducks and muskrats.

He knew how it was:

Always reading in some journal, that how if you got this or that you'd be sitting in clover, all your troubles over, everything hunky-dory. He'd done it himself, put in this and that, pulled it out, found the soil or the climate no good for it, that it was a racket. Ah, it was a fine thing to look at the farms when they had half a chance, when there was half a crop, and half a price. The animals looked good, too, and he passed trucks full of squealing fat hogs going to market, and saw the faces of heifers and steers looking over the laths. He stopped once and some sheep came to the fence and looked at him, and he looked at them. He knew the hills would be full of berries and grapes, but he felt too lazy to get them. He had done his harvesting. He thought he would bring the girls down some day and let them gather grapes and berries, but he knew he never would.

He stopped at another tavern at the crossroads, where an old man with a dog gave him beer, the dog walking at the old man's heels. He drank down the beer and had another. He didn't count the money spent. He was like a man at a carnival who will cheerfully spend everything he has. The old man sat down with him after the fifth beer and had one himself, and they both lighted up and talked about crops, the fishing, and the weather. And then they got to telling stories, and Lars told the story about the Negro who was going to Birmingham . . .

They both laughed and their pipes went out, and they lighted up again, and the old man brought two more beers and told another story. They laughed and looked out the window down the road where two carloads of fishermen were just coming up from the river, their poles on top of their cars. And the old man began to tell about when he was young, and Lars listened and it seemed pretty wonderful to him. And the old man got out some pictures in an old cigar box that had a picture of a chorus girl of the nineties stuck on the lid; and he showed Lars pictures of children now gone or dead, and of his wife, austere and thin.

The old man said, "Why, sir, my wife was a saint. When she had her first baby she didn't know what was ailin' her till the fourth month. I was ashamed. I had to up and tell her she was goin' to have a youngun. I felt like a goat. She was a saint if ever there was one."

Lars laughed and said, "I got to be going up the river and get my old man out of jail."

"I'd like to go with you," the bartender said. "I know a man in Hastings who could fix it up. But there's nobody to keep store. Should I shut up?"

"No," Lars said, "you shouldn't, what with hard times. Nobody can tell how many pike fishers might be in for beer between now and sundown, and want to fill up and maybe want some hard liquor." Lars winked.

And the old man said, "I'd like a snort of hard liquor myself."

Lars said, "Sure, I would too. Why didn't you come out with it sooner?" He took a snort and bought a pint bottle for himself and put it in his pocket. Then he got into his car, the old man, like a broken stick, telling him where the turn was at the brick house.

"My own grandfather laid the bricks in that house and in all the viaducts around about, one of the best masons in the country. He laid every stone and brick worth layin' and was a boozer from way back, drank hard liquor like a baby drinks milk, and lived to a hearty old age, sound as a nut."

"Yes, sir," Lars said, and drove off toward Hastings, now only a few miles away. And he turned at the brick house and came to the corkscrew bridge which he hadn't seen since he was a young man and came here for his marriage license. That's why he knew where the courthouse was, which he entered and went down to the left wing.

The jailer opened the door, grinning, and brought the old man out grumbling. "Well you took your time about it," in Swedish, and hooked his bones onto the side of the chair, folding his old bent legs under him, then said in broken English, "I told the old woman to send for you. You got to go to Thief River and get my harvest money out of the seaman's chest in the barn, and get me out."

"Why don't she do it?" Lars said.

"She don't know where it is," the old man said cunningly, "and I won't tell her. She might spend it."

Lars laughed. "I got other things to do myself," he said.

The old man said, "You get the money and get me out. It's a hundred and ten dollars."

"A hundred and ten dollars!" Lars whistled. "That's plenty. How much did you make on your wheat?"

"A hundred and twenty. I spent ten already."

"All your harvest money," Lars said.

The old man bent his head but looked from under his shaggy brows with one cunning eye. Lars had to laugh.

"Take a snifter," he said, offering his bottle of moon.

The old man threw back his turkey-gobbler throat, and it turned red slowly from the powerful drink. He took out a half pint from his own lean pocket and filled it from Lar's bottle, quick as a wink. Lars began to laugh. There they were, sitting in the Hastings jail, as naked of worries as jays. By Heavens, he hoped he lived as long as the old man; he hoped he lived forever.

Outside the barred windows he saw the tall black trees standing in the golden day. A fiery juice of life seemed to pour through his huge and powerful frame, and he felt as if he could bend the bars back and he and the old man could climb, like youngsters, through the window and tear across the courthouse lawn, escaping down to the river where they would build a raft and float down to Natchez in the moonlight.

He became excited as if he was going to do all that, and yet he knew that he wasn't going to move. He didn't want to move, sitting on the stool opposite the crafty old man who must still feel the wild burgeoning of the young liquor in his veins; must still feel it though he must be eighty-five if he was a day. Lars suddenly loved the old man. He put his arms around him.

"Don't take any wooden nickels. I'll get the money back. I'll see if I can talk to the sheriff." He wanted to appear young and important to the old man, as if he still had some power in the world because of his physical strength, his vitality.

"Good . . . good boy," the old codger said. "Good boy." And Lars resented it.

"I'll mail the money in tomorrow; I can't waste another day," Lars said at the open door as if he moved, enormously busy, in the processes of a swarming life already ghostly to the old man. But, looking back, he didn't want to leave the old man. There he stood, fragile as a cricket, his hands almost to his swollen knees, so little Lars could have picked up the strong stubborn bones and taken them with him.

The sheriff said, "But he does this every spring and fall. He's a menace—tearing down the highway."

"Did he ever kill anybody? You never heard of him having an accident, did you?"

"No," the sheriff said, taking a drink from Lars's bottle, "but that's because we always catch him in time. Danged if I ever see the beat of it."

They both grinned. "Aw, cripes," Lars said, "a man's got to have his fling; you know how it is." They both grinned and sat a while. "Have another drink," Lars said.

"Don't care if I do. Well, it's a pretty stiff fine, all right, but them fly cops . . ."

"The old man's pretty canny when he's drunk; just as a grasshopper spitting juice, he's harmless. You and I are getting on a little, Sheriff."

"Speak for yourself, Lars; I'm as chipper as I was at fifty."

"Why, Sheriff, a man wouldn't take you for a day over fifty."

"And you, Lars Larson . . . it's amazing. They must take good care of you 'cross the river there. What keeps you so young?"

"Aw, you're full of taffy."

"Well, you get me fifty and I'll just have to have another snifter."

When Lars left he looked up at the barred window. Even if the old man was looking out he knew there would be no sign of it. He would simply look out at his son and the strong blood feeling would be tender between them, strong as the sweet day. He stood in the strong light feeling that tumult in his blood caused by seeing the old man, feeling his blood kin rousing him to this wild warmth. He stood under a tree and took a swig from his bottle.

He drove back swiftly; it was getting coolish. Once he stopped and tore the melons open with his hands and ate them, and they went good with the hot corn liquor burning in him. Driving through the hills, he passed the tavern of the old man and the dog, drove into the hills where the valleys were cool and dark and the hill tips rose, catching the sunlight. Letting the old car rattle down a hill he saw a marvelous orchardful of crab apples, and his mouth watered. By Jesus, he hadn't seen such a fine orchard of crab apples in many moons, the trees were loaded, they shone red and smart.

Without even thinking, now that the liquor was warm and strong in him, he turned in, drove up a turning road to a ramshackle house in the curve, and stopped the car. It was very still. Some ducks walked across to the water trough. It didn't seem as though anybody was home. He sat there in a little doze, guessing maybe he had drunk too much, and now his bones would ache, but he didn't feel any ache yet, only pleasantness. He could hear a bull kicking the sides of the barn, a steady thud. He dozed off, seeing everything through his half-closed eyelids. It all looked warm as if swimming in a golden syrup, and he heard a woman's voice from the house say:

"Do you want something?" He opened his eyes, and saw a woman in the door, her arm lifted so he could almost see the pit. She was shading her eyes, looking at him.

He moved his limbs; they felt heavy and fine. "Yes, ma'am," he said, feeling easy and hearty. He got out of the car. "That's a fine orchard of crab apples you got here," he said, going up to her, and she put down her arm and smiled easily.

"Yes," she said, "the best in these parts, if I do say it."

"Yes, sir," he said, "it's hard to get a crop like that what with pests and drouth, and tarnation in general."

She laughed, still standing in the door. He saw what fine arms she had, burned, and he could see the strong muscle turning on the bone, yet the flesh was ripe and full.

"How's chances for getting a peck of them apples?" he said, easy and slow, looking at her. She looked right back at him.

"All right," she said; "we ain't got any in the house, though. We ain't shucked them down yet. We'll have to go out and pick them up."

"Fine!" he said. "That suits me. I haven't been turned loose in such an orchard since I was knee-high to a grasshopper."

"Well, all right," her heavy slumbrous voice said. "Wait and I'll get a basket."

He stood at the door rubbing his hands together. He felt heavy and fine. He wondered if she could tell he'd been drinking. Shucks, he hadn't been drinking much—just enough to put silk on his bones.

She came out with a bonnet on that hid her hair and face and made her body more noticeable. He walked beside her to the orchard and he could feel the strong easy swing of her legs, and her body settling down easy on each step, then rising and settling again. By God, he liked that—the way she walked. Her strong breasts hung down in her wrapper and she walked swiftly, stooping to pick up the apples in her brown talons. He picked up apples too, dropping them into the basket. On one side the apple was warm, on the ground side cool as a cucumber.

His mouth watered from touching them and he set his teeth into one, and the white crab juice sprang out on his mouth and chin, and ran into his fingers. It was a fine taste, and he looked at the woman while he was eating, and she went on swiftly scooping up the apples which she was now putting into her apron and dropping into the basket all at once. He felt like a slacker in the face of her swift voluptuous industry, and he spit out the core and began to pick again. He found himself picking close to her and he felt heady. The orchard was silent around them, and as far as he could tell, all the menfolks must be out in the fields or gone to town with hogs or steers. Apples dropped from the trees around them, or farther away in the orchard, and a strange communication was between them as they walked under the little gnarled apple trees of the orchard.

And he only half heard when she said, "I think there was a wind last night. I think enough have shaken on the ground."

He was walking powerfully beside her and he felt again that strong and terrible desire. It was mixed with the feeling of the whole day, some last redolence of the blood before winter. He felt a fright to think of his towering strength diminishing in him in ills, aches, and debility, until one morning in some fall he would be old and dying and could feel no more the plow, the hot resurgence of spring and brandy, the potent flood of desire and life.

They passed through a grove of live oaks, and hanging from the trees by their feet were two steers freshly butchered, their entrails a-light in the sun, blood soaking into the ground.

"Sure," he heard himself saying, "a right smart wind down the valley." But all the time he felt the strong shifting of her weight in a thrust of energy, and the down-dropping relaxation of her whole body as she settled on the earth, and he saw the long sweep of her hips as her dress fell in front and slightly hitched in back.

She said, "My husband took the steers to market," and it startled him.

They were alone there then, and he felt the subtle and curious surge of her strong bending hips, the rhythmic dip toward the earth and then the slight rise as she dropped the apples in her apron, which she held up with her other hand. Then she lifted her head in the hot silence and he saw her young and burned face from within the sunbonnet, and most of all he saw her eyes looking at him as if he were a young man in his prime, and her woman's mouth slightly open and the moisture of her movement shining on her face. And then she lowered her head again and filled the basket.

He didn't move. It was very quiet with just the apples dropping. It was the moment. He knew that. The baskets were full, the sun was setting. He moved towards her and he felt her stiffen and wait. And he stood very close to her and as he reached for the basket he touched the golden down on her arms and he saw the turn of the young powerful flesh up the bone gleaming and sweating. His big brown hand tightened around the belly of her arm and she did not move. He felt her breath, odorous of apples and the sun hot on one cheek.

Then, he took the basket from her, and he knew the moment was over forever and he felt a kind of huge peace with the slanting sun. And he walked silently beside her, and it was as if she felt it too. He poured the two baskets of apples into the back seat and saw it was nearly full of the little apples, cheek by jowl. He ate another, fingering the round tiny cheek.

He turned to the woman, who stood by the well, her face half hidden and secret. He started to say, "How much?" But something in her forbade him, as she stood there, still accessible to him. And he knew he would always see her standing there in the long fingers of the sun, like the opulent earth, like the great harvest, like all of his life, open-handed, generous, sweet-smelling.

"I thank you," he said, taking off his hat and dropping it. "I surely do thank you." He felt his face reddening as he stooped to pick up his hat. And he still felt her generous silence as he started the car and called good-bye. And when he looked back at the turn of the road she was gone.

The dusk caught him before he crossed the bridge towards home. The village looked strange and neat to him, and he drove into his own yard with relief as if he had had a great adventure, gone through dangers. The lamp was lit in the kitchen and the girls' faces clustered in the door. He shouted at them, and went through, the warm hands touching him, and the bodies of the girls changing into women, and their bright tender faces towards him.

His wife stood at the stove. She turned her startled face towards him, not knowing what he felt, nettled by his absence. Supper was all ready and he washed his hands and sat down, and took a fresh piece of bread. They had baked that day, and he could see his wife at the stove looking askance, not knowing what had befallen him.

The girls at the table in the lamplight were full of questions, and he began to swing into his story, making it a fine one. He felt strange and looked at the faces around him, and they seemed almost comic. It was like some Swedish fairy tale where you leave a picnic, go around a mountain, meet a gnome, marry, live a whole life, and then come back and your mortal wife is just wiping up the dishes from the meal not half an hour ago.

His wife was frying potato pancakes; so she stood in the half dark at the stove, and he knew she was looking at him and hanging on every word he was speaking to them. Once he stopped and lifted his head. "Bet you don't believe that, Mama, eh?"

She snorted in the dark. "Bet you got drunk yourself," she said; "bet you had a girl with you."

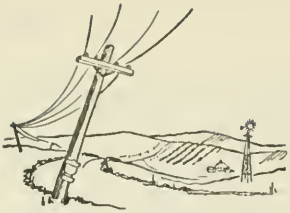
The girls made little screams and clucks. He threw back his head and laughed and the girls laughed with him. "What do I need of a girl?" he said, looking around at the strong, gleaming daughters' flesh.

"What do I need of any more girls?" And they smiled and were pleased.

He felt strong and fine. His wife sniffed at the stove, and he got up, pretending to get water, and he stopped on the dark side away from the lamp, beside her. And she kept on turning the pancakes cooking on top of the stove. The fire from the cracked iron flew over her face, and he could smell the good smell of her flesh and of her hands. He put his hand on her thigh where the children could not see, and put his wind-burned face into her warm neck.

She turned her head, laughing into her shoulder. "Lars," she said, "the children, please—" And her face was full of fright and desire and embarrassment. "Please, Lars . . ."

And from the darkness of his fields came the full rich lowing of cows.



Coursing the Coyote

Aubrey Neasham

IT has been said that the coyote has more than his share of brains. Surely, his propagation in the face of an advancing civilization has been astounding, at times, and indicative of his ability to cope with that other animal, the human being. The more farms and ranches which have come into being, the more opportunity there has been for him to steal his way into permanency.

There are many stories and poems written about the sagacity of the loping grey creature. Some do him justice and others tend to lessen his powers as a wizard. The following account, found in the yellowed pages of a leading western newspaper, is unique in its presentation of the remarkable thinking and outwitting qualities of Mr. Coyote. Taking place near Virginia City, Nevada, it could have happened anywhere in the West and at any time. The account appeared in the *San Francisco Chronicle* for March 31, 1878. It has been slightly edited.

In the absence of deer upon the trail of which they might legally turn their hounds loose, a number of the sportsmen of Virginia City, having succeeded in securing a trapped coyote, resolved upon having some sport with him. The coyote was placed in a box, which was put into a wagon and taken out into the alkali plains about eighteen miles east of the city one day last week. The well-known sportsmen whose names follow procured the best mounts obtainable and accompanied their dogs and captive to the chosen coursing ground: Alderman Rawlings, J. S. Kaneen, James Orndorff, J. Kerr, Jack Magee, Mr. Meide, Dan Lyons, James Cheryberger, James Rock, Lewis Reynolds, Matt. Bean, Dan S. Kerry and nearly a dozen others. It proved to be one of the most novel and exciting day's sport ever witnessed in that part of the country. Fox hunting was dull in comparison. The coyote showed less of the vanishing speed than Mark Twain has attributed to the brute in his characteristic description, but what he lacked in speed he made up in spunk when run down. The affair is thus described by a local chronicler: The place selected for the liberation of the coyote was a sort of alkali flat about six or seven miles wide. The coyote, caged in a closed box, had been brought to the place in a wagon, and was liberated at about 12:30 in the center of the flat. It was agreed to allow him to reach the edge of the sagebrush, some three miles distant, before the hounds were slipped. When let out of his box the coyote trotted off leisurely, leaving behind some eighteen or twenty hounds struggling frantically on the leash and clamoring for the run.

It took the coyote about fifteen minutes to reach the edge of the flat, and just as he melted into the sagebrush the pack were turned loose upon the desert and took the trail in full cry, followed by a well-mounted field. The sagebrush was soon reached and then the chase began in earnest. Kaneen, who was splendidly mounted, took the lead, with Jack Magee close at his heels, and the rest of the field trailing behind. The sagebrush and boulders were not the easiest things in the world to run in, but the horses, which by this time seemed to have got warmed up to the work, made light of the rough condition of the track as they went crashing through the brush or took flying leaps over the boulders. The hounds were about half a mile ahead in the sagebrush, their course marked by a continuous yelping and a trail of dust. After a run of about twenty minutes the coyote turned upon the trail and took a course leading back to the flat. Reaching the limit of the sagebrush, it shot into the clear flat again and made a beeline for the box from which it was first liberated.

The hounds cleared the brush but a few minutes behind, with the field not twenty yards in the rear, and at this point the chase became very exciting. The flat was as level as a floor, and when the field straggled out of the brush the coyote was about half a mile ahead and had three miles to run before reaching the box, a point for which it was evidently making. Horses, hounds, and coyote were now all for the first time in sight of each other. About half a dozen horsemen led the field, with Kaneen, Magee, Alderman Rawlings, and Jim Orndorff in the van. As they neared the box the coyote was pretty closely pressed by the hounds, but made a spurt and slid into his old retreat like a flash of lightning. The driver of the team who had brought him out jumped down and closed the door, and in a minute a pack of disappointed dogs were yelping all around it. The riders came up immediately afterward, and a hearty cheer went up in honor of the sagacious coyote, followed by a general laugh when the utter ridiculousness of the situation became apparent.

After the coyote had taken about half an hour's rest it was decided to give the hounds a second run, and the snarling coyote was again turned out upon the cold charities of the sagebrush. He made off this time at a pace which discounted his first effort. It did not take over five minutes for him to reach the sagebrush, and the instant he disappeared the field took the trail. He covered about the same ground as before, but doubled more frequently and ran a good deal faster. In about twenty minutes he again turned into the flat, and "Little Martin," the driver, who was near the box with his team, concluded to go out and meet him. The coyote was doubling in fine style on the hounds, but when Martin had traveled about a mile from the box the pursued animal turned and made for the wagon. The dogs overtook him when he was yet about fifty yards from the wagon, and the leader springing forward fastened his teeth in his shoulder. The coyote turned nimbly, and appropriating a portion of the dog's ear traveled on, and gaining the wagon stopped directly under it, trotting along like a coach dog beneath the fore axle. The hounds surrounded the wagon, yelping savagely, and one would occasionally shoot between the wheels to try conclusions with the coyote, who would generally send him howling back with the blood streaming from his hide. The coyote finally become emboldened with his success, and gliding from between the wheels sprang into the center of the pack, and for a few seconds fought savagely with the dogs, ripping the skin from the flanks of a couple, and sliding back to its vantage ground again when numbers threatened to overpower him.

Little Martin, the self-constituted guardian of the coyote, enjoyed the fun immensely, and drove the wagon straight up to the box. The hounds, which seemed to anticipate a repetition of the first strategic movement, made a rush to cut off the retreat but the hunted animal fought his way through, and clearing the back of the last one in his way by a leap that must have measured five times his length, he gained the door of the box and was inside again in a second. The field now came up and sent up another succession of hearty cheers for the coyote who had made two so plucky runs and succeeded in two so gallant escapes.

At this point Kaneen saw a jackrabbit bounding over the flat and gave chase. His horse had hardly started when his hat went off, and the tremendous wind which by this time was sweeping over the flat took his hat, and, turning it upon its brim, sent it along like a wheel at the rate of about twenty miles an hour. Kaneen followed, putting his horse at its best speed, and the chase was as exciting as any fox run ever seen in the State. He overtook and captured his hat four miles from the starting place. After his return all hands took the road for home, bringing the coyote with them, and he is now in Rock's Stable, as lively as ever and ready for another run.

THE FENCE ROW

James Hearst

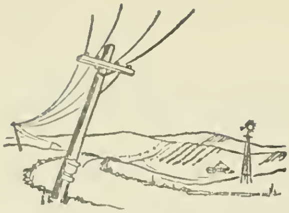
A ripple of ground still shows the line where
a fence once divided this field in two—
the habit of being divided fades slowly
and may not be smoothed out in one growing season.

Here where two fields shared a common boundary
that kept corn from oats and the meadow from rye
the limit set to please some farmer's business
has now been plowed over and planted to crops.

There were stones here once and woodchuck burrows,
these things belong to the edge of a field,
and probably wild grapevine had looped protection
around the nest where the hen pheasant sat,

and rested its vines on the barbed-wire fence
that stood for authority once in this place
till the wire went slack and the barbs grew rusty
and posts rotted off and soon nothing was left

in the wave of the ground but a few wild rose roots,
though lately I found a freshly dug den
where a fox of the old school loyal to his party
had refused to admit that the fence row was gone.



You Should See Shettles

Kathleen Sutton

WHEN small bales of a strange looking hay labeled *Kudzu* appeared on display in every bank in north Alabama, my naturally energetic curiosity was stirred to action. Which ultimately brought me to Mr. Pruitt, head of the soil conservation program in Limestone Valley.

"Kudzu," he explained enthusiastically, "prevents soil erosion, which is pretty bad in this non-porous red clay around here. It also makes good hay. If you like, I'll take you out and show you our whole program in this section."

Mr. Pruitt is a slight, earnest young man not so long out of agricultural college at Auburn. We drove out the highway, soon turning off on the narrow red roads that wind through endless acres of corn and cotton interspersed with small stretches of timber and pasture land. Without his mentioning it, I was impressed that in some fields the corn stood about ten feet high, while in others it was barely three. Likewise, the cotton in some instances was thick with the snowy bolls, while other showed the growth gone mostly to foliage.

"That's the difference between the farmers who co-operated with us and those who didn't," Mr. Pruitt explained. "Notice in those healthy fields how the rows follow the natural curve of the slope. That's what we call contour plowing. The farmers hate it because it's more trouble; they are used to plowing straight."

"Then why—" I asked, feeling stupid.

"It keeps the rains from washing straight down the slope and gullying it out. The water runs along the rows, the overflow caught by the terracing—that's those grassy mounds separating the rows every twelve feet or so—but the main stream is directed into a natural ravine emptying into timberland if convenient. Otherwise it goes into the road gullies."

He paused, a brooding expression darkening his face. "The trouble with emptying it into the road gullies is that it wears them down sometimes twelve or fourteen feet. That puts the road pretty high up. On this slick day it's mighty easy to skid off into the gully—which isn't so good."

I could see that. Even on a dry road, those formidable gullies on either side were slightly nerve-wracking. Tactfully I pointed out a field of exceptionally tall corn. He admitted it was a good stand. "But you should see Shettles' corn! He's been interplanting with crotalaria now for two years."

"Shettles?" I asked curiously.

"Yeah. Crotalaria is a legume we sow between rows. It reseeds itself and is a soil builder. You see, bacteria store nitrogen in the roots and—"

"But Shettles," I persisted. "Who is he?"

"A nigger around here. He owns forty acres, and he's one of the best citizens we have, black *or* white. If more farmers were like him this would soon be the richest land in the state. He's done everything we told him, and the trouble is to keep him *from* working. That's unusual, you know—for a nigger."

I inquired if he had difficulty in getting the farmers to follow his program. "The worst trouble," he said, "is with the tenant farmers—the share-croppers. They don't own the land and they don't care what happens to it in the next twenty years. The landlords co-operate to the extent of telling us to go ahead, and providing fertilizer and tools, but they don't show any real interest in the tenants who go right back to planting cotton when we aren't looking."

We drove on, Mr. Pruitt continuing to point out examples of strip planting, crop rotation, and hills taken out of cultivation entirely, drilled with seedling slash or loblolly pine, or graceful black locust. "This is a little north for slash," he said, "but we find it does all right. We're planting it in anticipation of the paper industry. Loblolly's for timber, and black locust is used for fence posts. In thirty years we should have good forests along here."

He was quiet a moment, a look of sadness again crossing his face. "Sometimes," he brooded, "we've drilled a whole hill with slash pine and one of those share-croppers has come along and plowed it all under and sowed cotton."

"But Shettles—he wouldn't do that, would he?"

He brightened instantly. "I wish you could see that Shettles working black locust. He hoes it like it was cotton. And he's got the best field of kudzu hay around here. For two years he's done everything we told him. And his cotton! I wish you could see his cotton!"

I was intensely interested in this Shettles. A Negro who does everything he is told for two years bears investigation. I inquired if he lived near enough for us to pay him a call. Mr. Pruitt was as delighted as a small boy asked to show off his pet dog. We turned off on an even narrower road winding gently up a hill. Halfway up, he pointed out a deep, ugly-looking red gully. "That's soil erosion at its worst," he said. "But Shettles has planted kudzu in a place just as bad as that, and it is nearly healed over already. The tangled roots spread the water and hold the soil."

All the way up I heard of the wonders Shettles had performed under the supervision of Mr. Pruitt. He was the "workingest" Negro in Alabama, and his farm, which had been practically ruined by erosion, was now one of the most productive in the valley. Shettles, it would seem, didn't care whether he grew cotton or soy beans, just so long as he kept busy plowing and sowing and working his fields. Whatever failure or discouragement Mr. Pruitt had met with elsewhere was obviously more than compensated for by Shettles' wholehearted cooperation.

I could scarcely restrain my eagerness to meet Shettles, when at last we drove up before an unpainted shack with a sagging front porch railed by a row of scraggly ferns growing in lard pails. A husky-looking young Negro sprawled on the plank step, asleep.

"Where's Shettles?" Mr. Pruitt called to him.

The Negro yawned widely and sat up. "He inside sleepin'," he said at last. "Y'all want I should call him?"

Mr. Pruitt looked rather peculiar. "Tell him I want to see him."

In a few moments a middle-aged Negro, wearing patched overalls and a grin spread from ear to ear, appeared. "Mr. Pruitt, I sho' am proud you come by to see me t'day. Howdy, Mist'ess. I jest about fixin' to leave hyere."

"Leave!" I exclaimed incredulously. "Why, Shettles, Mr. Pruitt has been telling me what a fine worker you are and how splendid your farm is coming along."

He grinned even more widely. "Yas'm, hit sho' is. But Mr. Pruitt, he done fooled me too much. He say whin I sign my name to dat coperatin' paper, dat I jest leave hit all to him an' he gits me de bestest farm in Alabama. He ain't say nothin' about all dat turracin' I gotta do dat break a man's back twell he cain't hardly move."

"But the terracing saved your cotton field, didn't it?" Mr. Pruitt interrupted hastily. "Haven't you got the biggest yield you've ever had?"

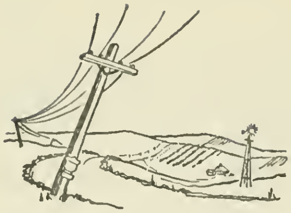
"Yassuh. But I ain't got de strengf to pick hit. An' Dozie—dat's my wife," he explained to me—"she say she done wore out plowin' and hoein' all summer on dat black locus', an' effen she gonna pick cotton too I gots to cook de soup. Soup cookin' ain't no job fo' a man, an' I fixin' to lease de farm to Walter yonder and split on de gover'ment cash money an' go up de country to Washin'ton. Dozie, she got kinfolks dere."

Mr. Pruitt's face was crimson, and he waved his arms excitedly. "But you can't go way off to Washington, Shettles. You'd die away from this farm. You'd always be wondering about your cotton crop and—"

"Yassuh, dat's what de doctor done tol' me. But Dozie, she gittin' de change ob life, an' she cain't wuk like she could. She say she gits so hot she fall flat in de fiel'. An' dis mawnin' she tuk a hard whuppin' whin she step in a waspes nest. She in de house now wif her ankle all swoll up."

"But, Shettles, with all this fine stand of corn and cotton—"

"Yassuh, Mr. Pruitt, but cotton sellin' fo' nine cents, an' I 'clare fo' de Lawd, hit costes me all o' dat to grow hit. An' I done broke my back an' got me a nervous misery all ober my body turracin' like you tol' me. Wiv Dozie plumb wore out now, I reckon I lease de farm like I said an' go up to Washin'ton. Mr. Roosevelt, he don' want no turracin' done up dere too, do he?"



Big Brother

Charlie May Simon

IT happened between the time he went out to the well to draw a bucket of water and came back with it splashing over his bare feet as he set it on the kitchen shelf. The figure on the bed was white and stiff, and the heavy, loud breathing had stopped. And the women and men who had sat through the night, got up and stirred about as if this thing they had been waiting for had happened at last. Some of them comforted his mother, speaking to her in gentle tones as if she were the sick one now; some went into the kitchen to cook hot biscuits and coffee for the family, and some bathed the face of the big brother with carbolic acid to keep it from turning black before morning, and closed his eyes with silver quarters to hold them down. They spoke of him no longer as a person named Ned, but as "the corpse" or "it."

"You Orvil," one of the neighbor women, Aunt Lucinda, said to him, "it's time you took your dose of polecat grease. You don't want that sniffling cold of yours to go into pneumony, too. You see what happens when it does."

He swallowed some of the stuff, and he let the neighbor woman rub his chest with turpentine and lard until it burned under the flannel cloth he wore pinned to his undershirt, for he was afraid.

A strangeness had come over the room that had not been there before, though nothing was changed. The straight chairs, one with a broken seat and one with no back, were scattered over the room, and the men sitting in them were silent and uncomfortable. Even old Uncle Jock, who was always talking and saying funny things that made them laugh, sat still, silently chewing and spitting now and then through the broken windowpane. The women walked about on tiptoe and talked in awed whispers.

"The whippoorwill called three times on the roof of the house and I knowed in reason it would happen," one said.

"And last night on my way here, I heared the hound-dog at the big house a-howling fit to kill," another said.

A gust of wind blew through the broken windowpane, and the flame from the lamp on the dresser flared up over its sooty chimney, making queer shadows on the newspaper-covered walls, and lighting up the little room, bare of all but a bed and a dresser and chairs with neighbors sitting in them. Aunt Lucinda stuffed the broken pane with an old quilt, and Uncle Jock moved his chair close to the door, which he opened and closed again every time he wanted to spit.

Orvil looked up at his mother, rocking her body to and fro in a chair close to the bed, hiding her mouth with her hand as she always did since her teeth had been pulled. Her hair was stringing down her face, and she made no effort to push it back. She smiled at him tenderly, almost caressingly. Not for two years, since baby Tom was born, had she smiled at him like that, for she was too busy working in the fields and about the house to show affection for any but "the least one."

Slowly the light of the early morning came into the room, dimming the glow of the lamp. Through the window the cotton plants, coming up to the doorstep, could be seen gradually taking form, changing from black objects to dried, brown stalks, with here and there a grey, bedraggled boll that had been overlooked in the picking. Far away on the horizon the trees of the bayou were lighted orange and pink by the rising sun. One of the men whispered to another; then they left the house and walked toward the cotton-shed—all but the father, who sat staring down at the floor and did not move.

"Blow out the lamp, son," Orvil's mother said to him.

He went to the dresser, turned the wick low, and blew hard. The smell of burnt oil came from the chimney as the flame died out. The mirror, facing the iron bed, was covered with an old meal sack, which fluttered as his breath blew on it. On the edge of the dresser, half hidden by the meal sack, Orvil saw his brother's harmonica. So many times had he wanted to play it, but each time he had started to pick it up, Ned would slap his fingers and shout, "Hey, that there's my harp. You leave it be." And he would take it himself and sit down on the door stoop and blow through it, patting his feet as he made gay tunes. Orvil could only stand there watching, and wishing with all his heart he could snatch it and run. What tunes he could make on it if only he had the chance!

There it was now, among the clutter of bottles and jars and glasses of medicine on the dresser. As he reached out for it, he quickly turned back to look at the figure on the bed. A sheet was drawn over the still face. There was no longer a person there, but a thing that was helpless and silent, that could not slap and shout at him. With his heart beating fast he put the harmonica in his pocket and quickly walked off to the far corner of the room. Some instinct told him he could not play it here, and he started toward the door.

"Orvil," his mother called, "it's too chilly to go out of doors without a coat. Here—" She took Ned's new woolen jacket with the sheepskin lining down from the wall where it was hanging. "You might as well take it now and get some use out of it."

The coat was big. It came almost to his knees, and the sleeves flapped down over his hands, but the sheepskin lining was soft and warm—far warmer than the old one of Ned's cut down to fit him. That one would be made over now to fit Tom, the least one, who had no coat at all and had to be wrapped in a quilt on cold days, when he went out. It came to Orvil that he was the big brother now, and his heart swelled with pride. Little Tom started after him, but he pushed him aside and said, "You're too little to go where I'm going," in the same voice he had heard Ned speak to him. With his hands in his pockets, one hand clutching the harmonica, he swaggered out of the house in the way big brothers do.

He walked down the turnrow toward the cotton-shed, kicking the clods of hard black earth at his feet. A flock of red-winged blackbirds flew over his head on their way to the rice fields, and he thought of the slingshot Ned had started to make before he took sick. He'd finish it himself, and he'd smooth the wood of it with a case knife from the kitchen, just as he'd seen Ned do.

From the cotton-shed there came sounds of sawing and hammering and the voices of men talking. They were more cheerful now, away from the house with its strange atmosphere of quiet.

"It's five feet, I know, for I measured it myself," one said.

"Lem here ain't takin' no chance on wasting lumber," another laughed. "The time we made the coffin for old peg-legged Matt, durned if he didn't want to nar' it down to fit the one leg."

Orvil took the harmonica out of his pocket. Here, surely, where there was laughter, he could play.

Uncle Jock looked up, and at once the smile left his face.

"Here comes the second one, looking right lonesome," he said. "As a feller says, it goes harder with the younguns than the older folks sometimes."

The men were silent now, and when they looked at Orvil, there was pity in their eyes. Here was not the place either, to play the harmonica. He sat down on a wagon tongue and watched the men at their work of making a coffin out of rough pine boards.

When the box was finished, the women, wrapped in coats and sweaters, came from the cabin bringing a clean sheet which they cut up and tacked in for a lining. They scalloped a long strip to go around it, for decoration.

"I reckon your breakfast is about ready, son," one said to him.

The very word "breakfast" made Orvil feel hungry and he ran back to the house where the good smells of coffee and fried meat from the kitchen mingled with the smell of carbolic acid rubbed on the face of the dead brother.

It was strange to sit at the table in the kitchen without Ned there, for he was ever the first at the call of food, ready to grab the biggest piece of everything. Uncle Jock's wife brought hot biscuits from the stove and a plate of fried salt pork with the grease still bubbling on it. Orvil hesitated, started to take the next biggest piece, then he remembered again that he was the oldest now; so he speared his fork in the biggest piece, curled and brown, and put it inside two biscuits that stuck together. He poured his coffee in a saucer from a cup with a handle, Ned's cup. His own, with the broken handle, stayed on the kitchen shelf, untouched. He took another piece of meat. Not often were there two helpings of fried salt pork for breakfast.

His mother ate silently, wiping her eyes from time to time on the bottom of her skirt. Her soiled percale dress was open at the front, where Tom, the two-year-old, nursed now and then at her drying breasts. His father reached out his hand and patted her shoulders shyly, as if ashamed to show the tenderness he felt, outside of a bed. The mother quickly fastened her dress in front and fed the child a rind of meat.

Through the window they saw the women coming back from the cotton-shed, followed by the men carrying the box on their shoulders.

Their mud boots made heavy, thumping sounds as they came into the house, and there was a noise of people whispering and bustling about in the next room.

When they had done with their breakfast, the mother put on a clean dress, shapeless over her thin body, and with her hands she smoothed back the hair that was stringing down over her face. They walked to the graveyard, with the neighbor men carrying Ned in the box before them.

Down the long turnrow to the narrow dirt road they went, in a line like a drab, faded banner over the fields, waving in and out among the dried cotton-stalks. Out of every tenant cabin they passed, others came to join them, the men wearing lumberjacks or denim jumpers over their blue overalls, and the women and children in sweaters, often faded and old, with here and there a soiled coat with cheap, matted fur, bought in some long ago good cotton year.

Orvil walked beside his mother and his father, who carried Tom in his arms, and he felt strangely important when the neighbors, who came from their cabins to join them, looked with compassion at him. They passed the commissary and the big house of the plantation manager, where there were trees and late fall flowers. The wind blew dead leaves on the box the men carried, and over their shoulders. The manager's children stopped in their play and stared as they passed, and even the manager himself lifted his hat and spoke respectfully to them.

"Don't be such a crybaby," Orvil said to little Tom in the manner of a big brother. And because the tears he saw were caused only by the cold, raw wind, the child smiled at him in a way that pleased him.

Far away from the cabin—two large plantations away—stood the church that served as a schoolhouse during weekdays, and the little cemetery, near it, of graves crowded close together. Some were marked with wooden slabs, and some were decorated with broken pieces of colored glass and pottery, or any bright and shiny thing that could be found. The men stopped with the box they were carrying, at a newly-dug grave. Two men with spades were still throwing dirt from the bottom of it.

And because everybody stood so solemnly around, scarcely speaking above a whisper out here in the cold, things seemed funny to Orvil that were never funny before—the way a bare limb of a persimmon tree leaned down toward the earth, and a mockingbird perched on the church steeple with his tail waving up and down in the wind, and the way old Aunt Lucinda wiped her nose when she cried instead of her eyes. He tried hard to keep from laughing. The muscles of his mouth kept turning up, and he forced them down each time. Uncle Jock lifted the lid of the coffin, and all crowded around to take a last look.

"Will here ain't never seen a corpse before," a neighbor woman said, and she held her child high so he could see over the heads of the older ones.

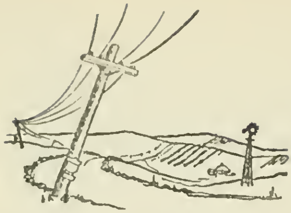
"I declare we plumb forgot to put in a pillow," Uncle Jock's wife whispered.

Orvil looked down at Ned, lying helpless and still in the box, and he wondered why he was ever afraid of this big brother. A great pity came over him, and his heart went out to this being in a rough pine box with no pillow at his head, about to be put under the ground and covered over with dirt. Tears came to his eyes, though he tried as hard to stop them as he had tried before to stop the laughter.

"Come on up, son, and touch the corpse so you won't dream about it tonight," Aunt Lucinda said to him.

But Orvil could not bring himself to do it. He pulled back and went to stand beside his mother, drying his eyes from time to time, unashamed, on her skirt. And he felt the rough hand of his father gently patting his shoulder. Ned had ever been one to stand up for his rights, and here were these people, one by one, going up to touch him so they would not dream of the dead that night. He wanted somehow to protect his brother, for he was the strong one now.

The lid was nailed on at last, and the box was lowered in the grave. Orvil clenched his hands tightly in his pockets. His right hand hurt with the pressure of Ned's harmonica. He drew the harmonica out and looked at it. For so long he had wanted to play it, and not even yet had he raised it to his lips. He hesitated, and a tear fell splashing on it and spread out over the shiny metal. Gently then he let it slide into the grave where it gleamed in the dark hole against the pine box. Then the men with the spades gradually covered it over with dirt.



Stampede

J. *Evetts Haley*

"IT was a rough, hard, adventurous life," said Colonel Goodnight, "but was not without its sunny side, and when everything moved smoothly the trip was an agreeable diversion from the monotony of the range. But things did not always move smoothly. For one thing there was the dreaded stampede. It was much more liable to occur with the Texas longhorn than with the highbred range cattle of today, and was especially to be guarded against during the first ten days or so of the drive. The cattle were nervous and easily frightened, and the slightest noise might startle them into running. Some cattle were stampeders by nature. Hence everybody was on the alert, and if we succeeded in holding the herd together the first two weeks we seldom experienced trouble from stampedes farther along on the trail. The men slept on the ground with their horses staked near by. Sometimes the demands were so urgent that a man's boots would not be taken off his feet for an entire week. The nerves of the men usually became so tense that it was a standing rule that no man asleep was to be touched by another until after he had been spoken to. The man who suddenly aroused a sleeper was liable to be shot, as all were thoroughly armed and understood the instant use of the revolver and the rifle."

The psychology of a stampeding herd was difficult to fathom. A well-managed herd ordinarily gave little trouble, but once it started stampeding it was hard to stop. Its running became almost chronic. To begin with, as in the case of Indians, the cause of a run might be obvious. But though in the first stampede the cattle might have run themselves to exhaustion, their nervous tension did not necessarily subside thereafter. Night after night they have been known to run, taking fright at "something," as we on the range say, which was apparently nothing—a "something" too subtle for the sophisticated sense of man. Three thousand steers would be dozing in peace—only a few restless old fellows on their feet—with the night-riders circling around them at an easy gait. Then "something happened," and with unbelievable suddenness, as quick as the flash of a wakeful eye and as unexpected as the flush of a covey of hidden quail, with an unearthly roar that was the blending of innumerable hoofbeats, with the earth quaking as if in fear itself, the cattle were up together and gone. A moment ago they slept in peace, comfortably scattered and headed to every point of the compass. And yet they rose to their feet, all headed in the same direction, and in impenetrable but perfectly co-ordinated mass they stampeded. At that electric instant the horse was keener than the man above him. Through his flesh there ran a tremor of excitement, his ears came up, his eyes flashed, and his breath came quick, as he instantly calculated the course of the herd. And before the man could think, the gentle, dozing horse had whirled, sprung, and charged into the night as a part of that wild race to, God himself did not know where. At first the man was helpless, and the horse alone rose above the riot of animal nature.

"In the excitement of a stampede a man was not himself, and his horse was not the horse of yesterday. Man and horse were one," Goodnight averred, "and the combination accomplished feats that would be utterly impossible under ordinary circumstances."

When the night was unfathomably dark—and stormy, dark nights witnessed the most stampedes—the rider felt the utmost helplessness as he sat his saddle and rode blindly across treacherous prairie-dog towns, across ravines and knolls and gullies, wildly rode into obscurity and sometimes oblivion. It was an unforgettable, elemental experience that timid men could not relish or weaklings endure.

As the cattle strung out, and the fastest and strongest animals pushed to the lead, the night-herder judged their course by the noise as his horse raced along in the darkness without spur or rein for the point of the herd. Once having gained this necessary but dangerous vantage, he pushed beside, even against, the lead animals, until, almost imperceptibly perhaps, they veered to one side. Those immediately behind veered with them, and others behind gave way too, and still the horse crowded in until the herd began describing an arc. Even if the man could not see the cattle, a well-trained horse—and night horses were carefully chosen for sure-footedness, good eyesight, and sense—

held the cattle to the arc until the swift animals in front closed the circle and caught the tail of the long-strung, stampeding herd, and thus threw the cattle into a mill.

"They invariably circled to the right," said Goodnight. "If any old trail driver ever knew of a herd milling to the left, I would like to hear from him."

Around and around they raced, as the cowboys squeezed the circle smaller, kept the wildest ones from flying out on tangents, and finally brought the mill to a stop. Often a few head broke out and scattered far and wide. When the cowboys failed to throw the cattle into a mill, the stampede sometimes passed entirely from control, and the herd which had left the bed-ground in a mass gradually scattered and lost its form.

Those wild rides in the lead of two or three thousand big steers, into night sometimes so dark the riders could not see their horses beneath them, were the most nerve-racking experiences of an exciting range life. Not the fact that falls would come, for they came almost every day, as any "stove-up" cowboy can attest, but the fact that they could not be seen as they did come was the thing that shook the staunchest nerve. A gully, a bluff, a precipice—these hazards loomed up in the mind of the man who was riding blindly, and they took their toll of cattle, of horses, and of cowboys. Some few may have placed their faith in God, but not many would have bargained His assistance for a clear-footed night horse, and almost all would have sworn by everything unholy that "the Lord wasn't out on a night like that."

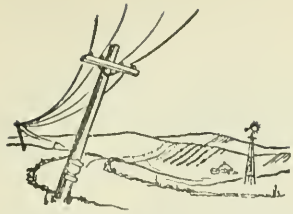
And so they rode with abandon—rode like the devil on holiday—while they laughed and swore in the teeth of the storm. After the stampede was over and the herd was gathered, the hands laughed, joked, and enjoyed it in retrospect. And usually the more distant the incident, the more they enjoyed it. Frank Mitchell, veteran of the JA ranges, tells of an old-timer at Clarendon who entranced his listeners with a wild tale of a terrible stampede years before. "In the darkness," the teller concluded, "the herd headed for a sixty-foot bluff and poured over the top like hell after a preacher. I was riding on their fetlocks when my night horse—and God, he was a good one—went over the top with them. And I was still a-settin' in the saddle like a reg'lar hand when he hit on his all-fours and bogged three feet deep in solid rock."

And yet some of them were religious, in a distant sort of way—especially those who were afraid of lightning. But others were like Murdo Mackenzie's defiant LIT hand who was caught out on guard one night in the type of storm that put the fear of God into most men's souls. An awful clap of thunder followed the striking of lightning near by, and the voice of rebellious old John Smith was heard to sing out above the din, challenging the Deity in lurid profanity to "shoot again." And while the herd took to the wild bunch, the boys gave sacrilegious John a wide berth, somewhat fearful that the Lord might accept the invitation. When the cattle were quieted, the boss circled around to John's side and heard him sweetly singing: "What a friend we have in Jesus."

"The heat developed by a large drove of cattle during a stampede was surprising," continued Goodnight, "and the odor given off by the clashing horns and hoofs was overpowering. Sometimes in cool weather it was uncomfortably warm on the leeward side of a moving herd, and to guard, as much as possible, against loss in weight and muscular strength from the effect of this heat the experienced trail manager always aimed to keep his cattle well distributed while they were in motion. Animal heat seems to attract electricity, especially when the cattle are wet, and after a storm I have seen the faces of men riding with a herd scorched as if some furnace blast had blazed against them."

Goodnight observed that the high Platte Plains, along the base of the Rockies, were particularly noted for electric storms. Perhaps only cowboys on herd have experienced in their full and awful sublimity the electrical displays of the High Plains country, when men killed by lightning "turned black as niggers in five minutes' time;" when horses were killed and bridle bits melted in their mouths, *conchas* from their saddles, and shoes from their hoofs; when the lightning struck the earth "and rolled along the ground in balls of fire;" and when the luminous display shone from three thousand sets of horns in the darkness, flashed back and forth on the night horses' ears, and glowed on each man's gloves and hat brim. Some men were mortally afraid of the lightning, and Goodnight recalled a camp near the Platte where one of his hands—"the toughest old nigger I ever saw"—rode into camp and said: "When the lightnen' gets on mah hawse's years, Ah throws mah gun away." But in such storms, often accompanied by terrific winds, the horse beneath the cowboy was more comforting than plenty of life insurance, because, as the old cowman said, "A horse will stand on the ground when the wind is so strong that it will blow a wagon away. I have been on horses and have seen everything in camp blown away, but never a horse went down."

In stampedes the cattle would run until they were tired, and we gradually spread them out to settle down. We never took them back to the same bed-ground, for we knew they would run again. We always tried to find the highest ground, where once settled, they would generally become quiet. As a rule it took several days to rid the cattle of the effects of a stampede. The most successful way I found of handling them was to drive all night. In this way we had them under control with the men all around them. I placed two of my most skillful men behind at the corner and four more out in front. If it was dark and the cattle had been badly stampeded they would not go far until they began to run again. Not all of them would be running, however. Strange to say, about one-half the herd would be marching along as if nothing had happened, while the rest would be going at a mad rate. The stampeders would come up on one side at full speed, but when they reached the point of the herd the men would catch and turn them back on the other side; then the men on the corners would drive them back again. They would run until they were in great distress, but the next night we followed this method again, and the cattle were cured. As a rule the herd would never stampede again.



The Red Table

Jack M. MacDonald

STRIP was calling her from the cellar. She dropped the last ear of corn in the pot and went to the narrow door beside the pantry. Pushing at her hair with the back of her hand, she answered him.

"Send Eddie down to wash my back," Strip called up to her. She could hear the water splashing. Strip would be standing up in the tin tub now doing his last soaping. "Supper's near done, Strip," she told him. "Ten minutes."

She walked out on the back porch, mechanically reaching up to feel if the clothes hanging there were dry. She called to Eddie. "Eddie, bring Sammy and come on in now. Helen'll wash his face. No, leave the wagon there. You go into the cellar and wash yer dad's back, Eddie. He wants you right now."

Now Strip would be hunkered down, waiting for Eddie. His broad chest would be showing white and wet below the tan of his neck, and the muscles of his back would be rumpling as he dried his black hair.

Millie went back into the kitchen. "Helen, turn down that radio. You wash Sammy's face fer supper. See if baby is sleeping before you come out." Now Strip would be running water from the hose over himself while Eddie hung up his coal-grimed pants and jacket. Strip would later throw his dirty shirt into the corner and put away his mine-cap and lamp on top of the potato bin. He'd reach for the clean blue shirt and tan cotton pants she'd laid out for him. It was the same procedure, evening after evening, week after week, year after year.

Yet, this evening there was a new excitement in the air. She could hardly wait for Strip to get upstairs. She was starting to pour vinegar from a bottle over a plate of sliced tomatoes and onions when Eddie dived under her arms. Eddie was five. Helen, now cornering Sammy to take him to the sink, was seven. Sammy was two. Just then Strip, fastening his belt, stood in the cellar doorway.

"You look purty tonight, Millie," he said, his white teeth showing for an instant. Then his eyes sought the stove. "Corn, hooray. I've been a-waitin' fer this." He pulled out one of the worn wooden chairs and sat down.

Millie jabbed a fork into the boiling corn. Then she spoke. "They's a young couple over lookin' at the stone house today. With Mr. Rodgers, the real estate man. An' I saw the young fellow come back with a man in a yellow car like Montgomery Builders have."

"Bet nobody's lived in that place fer fifty years." Strip reached over to pick a piece of raw onion from the plate. "Be nice to see it lit up."

The old stone house was the last dwelling on the street. Beyond it the paved highway turned into a black-top rural road. The house itself seemed more a part of the country than of the town, for it sat far back from the road with two sweeping willows concealing it from passers-by. In the rear was a huge old cedar, but there were no trees between the house and Millie's kitchen window. Only a hundred feet of weed-grown lawn, which Mr. Rodgers hired someone to scythe off once a year.

"If I'se that girl, I'd hate to start in on that place." Millie was putting the heaping plate of corn on the table. "Get the butter out, Helen. She had on a white dress and about the purtiest hair I ever seen. Shined in the sun when they's walkin' on this side of the house."

Strip grinned. "Maybe I'd better go over and help her get the place cleaned up. Quit that, Eddie! Wait till yer mother gets set down."

Millie placed the coffeepot on a turned-down plate and drew back a chair. She never even glanced at Strip. "You won't have to help her none, Strip Dobson," she said. "Her man makes you look like old Joe Davis." Joe Davis was the most slovenly character in the district, a chicken farmer who drove past each day in a broken-down buggy. It was reported that his chickens came in and out of his shack at will, sometimes roosting on his bed at night.

"Wonder who they are?" said Strip, as he reached to cut little Sammy's tomato slice into smaller pieces.

"Mayme Holben was in while they were over there and she said the young fellow looked like the youngest Easterbrooks boy. She said if that's who it was, the girl would be Mary Laird, Senator Laird's daughter. They were married about a year ago, she said. Her pap was that state senator that died here about three months ago. Remember that afternoon I told you I'se down street and all the stores was closed?"

"High mucky-mucks, huh?" Strip was on his fourth ear of corn. "Funny they'd take a place like that out in this end o' town. You'd a thought they'd a-wanted somethin' on the north hill." He dismissed the subject. "Guess they won't bother us none."

Millie got up to refill the corn plate. She stood for a moment looking out of the window toward the old stone house. "No," her voice was flat, "I guess they won't. But it'll be nice to have someone like that around just to look at."

The last white blossoms had dropped from the straggling blackberry bushes along the Dobsons' back fence, and the first green berries were turning red, as late June sped into July and on toward August. Strip, coming into the front room after supper one evening, announced:

"I'se out lookin' at the blackberries, Mill. You kin maybe bake a pie from them soon." He stopped. "What the Sam Hill are yuh doin'?"

Millie didn't look up. "I'm a-paintin' this mantelpiece white," she said. "The kids has knocked mosta the paint off the bottom here with that old coal bucket. Got this little can today down at the ten-cent store. Gonna look nice, ain't it?"

Strip didn't look at the mantelpiece as much as he did at Millie. "Sticks out like a sore thumb," he commented. "Never saw any mantels white before. Didn't they have no brown paint?"

Millie turned around, holding the brush over the can. Her look was distant. "They had brown paint," she said evenly, "but I wanted white. I've seen lots of mantels white."

Strip tapped her lightly on the nose with his forefinger. "There yuh go. Gittin' mad." He grinned. "I kin bring my tub up here now. Looks like a bathroom I saw in Helm Hotel once. I'll pound a nail or two in it to hang my clothes on."

"You'll pound no nails and you'll take no baths in front o' this, Strip Dobson." Millie was standing back, surveying her work. "You go out and keep the kids outa here. Sammy's stuck his hands on this twice already. I'm gonna set a chair against this door tonight."

Strip turned in the doorway. Millie looked at him a little uncertainly, seeing the humorous glint in his eyes. "What'll Mayme Holben say?" Strip asked. Maybe she'll think she's got into Easterbrooks' house when she comes in here."

"Mayme knows what the Easterbrooks' house looks like," said Millie loftily. "She talked to Sadie Cummings who helped 'em clean. Sadie says it's gettin' to look just like a picture. I could see some of the stuff they're doin' myself before she put her curtains up. The girl's a worker, Sadie says, and her man helps a lot in the evenings. He ain't like you."

"No, an' he don't dig coal all day, neither. I'm goin' outside, grouchy. I'll keep the kids outa yer way."

Millie watched him go, her eyes growing soft at the unconscious grace of his swinging stride. Then she turned again to survey the mantelpiece. She walked back from it, then forward. Two dark splotches on the dull oatmeal wallpaper beside the hearth held her attention. She went into the kitchen and came back with a dry cloth, which she rubbed vigorously over the splotches. But it did no good. Again she walked back and sat down in a chair. She looked at the gleaming white mantelpiece, then at the wallpaper, and then at the rest of the dull brown woodwork. Tentatively she took a bright-colored calendar which was thumbtacked to a side wall and stuck it above the mantel. She sat for a long time looking at her work, but her eyes were still troubled when she left the room, closing the door tightly behind her.

Millie was paring potatoes on her back porch that Saturday afternoon when she first heard their voices. She moved closer behind the morning-glory vines to screen herself from view.

At first their words were indistinct as they sauntered across the lawn toward the newly planted hedge between the two properties.

". . . and I thought we'd put the yew trees here," the girl was saying. "Eleanor will give me six of them. They're digging them out next week."

The boy was evidently facing the porch where Millie sat. "Our neighbors must be away," he said. "Don't see anybody around. Have you seen them yet?"

"I think I saw the two older youngsters going down street. Probably to the movies." It was the girl's voice again. "They're awfully cute and she tries to keep them clean. She's pretty herself. The biggest brown eyes you ever saw. I see her hanging out clothes now and then. Looks tired to me. But I guess that many youngsters would make anyone tired."

"I've seen the man going in and out once or twice, when I drove past," the boy said. "He looks smart enough. Wish I had his shoulders. He's well built."

Millie held her breath. Her mind was teeming with their talk. Big brown eyes. Tired looking. Tries to keep them clean. He's well built. She waited, not daring to touch a potato lest they heard her. Then their voices began to recede. She looked now and saw them swinging their hands together and walking toward the house.

Later she saw the boy come out and place two sawhorses on the grass under the cedar tree. Again he disappeared and brought some new boards from the cellar and seemed to be nailing them together. Then the girl came out, and they carried the sawhorse and the now door-like section of boards away from the tree and into the side yard where Millie could see clearly. The girl had put a large apron over her dress and carried a paint can and brush in her hand.

Indistinctly Millie could hear them talking. They placed the boards on top of the sawhorses and now Millie saw that it made an outdoor table. The boy sprawled himself on the grass to smoke while the girl began to paint.

She must have worked swiftly, for Millie, having gone into the house to see if the baby was all right and if Sammy was still taking his nap, came out again to see the tabletop glistening red in the sun. The girl was painting the sawhorse legs now. Every once in a while she would stop to look at her work and the boy would say something and she'd wave her paint brush threateningly at him. Somehow it reminded Millie of herself and Strip that day when she had painted the mantelpiece white. Millie felt sort of tight inside, as she did sometimes at the movies, when she watched the scene next door—the red table, the old stone house with its new white window sills, a patch of yellow flowers at the corner, the sun on the girl's hair, and the boy's white shirt against the grass.

When they finally stood up to look at the finished table, Millie arose too. Even after they had gone inside, she stood on her porch looking through the vines. Only when she heard Strip's step on the front walk did she go inside.

Things seemed to happen rapidly at the stone house during the next week, the third week in August. People were coming and going a great deal and there were cars parked there until late at night for several nights in succession. Then, one day at noon, Millie saw the boy step from a car. She knew him only by his walk, for he was dressed as she had never seen him outfitted before. In a dark blue uniform with gold on it and a white-topped, visored cap. He hurried into the house, walking stiffly erect.

Before she had time to tell Strip about it that night, he told her. "I heard today our neighbor Easterbrooks is goin' to war," Strip said. He had just come into the kitchen. "Clem Ruskin told me he got a commission in the Navy. Has to go some place down in Virginia. Guess the girl's goin' along."

Millie sat down suddenly. The plate and the dishrag she was holding seemed limp in her hands.

Strip walked to the kitchen window and looked over toward the stone house. He apparently hadn't noticed the effect of his words upon Millie. "Wonder what they'll do with the place?" he said. "They jest got it fixed up. Clem says Easterbrooks has been takin' flyin' work out at the airport all along. He's goin' into the air part of the Navy."

Millie held her voice steady. "I saw him come in in his uniform today." She got up and walked into the pantry and, without turning, said to Strip, "I wish, Strip, you'd look at the place where the hose is fastened on in the cellar. It's been leakin' all day. The place'll be full o' mud if you don't do something." She didn't come out of the pantry until Strip had gone downstairs.

Two days later Millie was coming into the house from the store, when she saw the red table again. Sammy was clinging to her hand, for she had taken him along, leaving Helen to watch after Eddie and the baby. It was late afternoon, almost time for Strip to get home.

Millie saw only the red table at first, for it was brighter now with colored dishes and a big bouquet of flowers on it. Then she saw a group of people gathered under the cedar tree, walking around, talking, smoking, laughing. Her eyes had come back automatically to the red table when she caught sight of Eddie. He was standing near the table with his fingers in his mouth, staring at it and at the new people under the tree. Even at that distance she could see that one of his overall straps was dangling and his hair was hanging over his eyes.

Putting Sammy quickly in at the front door and dropping her packages in the hallway, she hurried out to the front walk again. If she walked along the pavement keeping to the front of the house, maybe the willow trees would conceal her. Evidently none of the people had seen Eddie as yet for they were paying no attention to him.

Keeping the nearest willow tree between herself and the house, Millie cut across the lawn. She approached the house, pausing beside a little side porch. She tried to catch Eddie's eye, and finally he saw her. Without speaking, she motioned him vigorously to come to her. He took his fingers from his mouth, but still stood there. Millie stooped and made a motion as if she were spanking him and then stood up, looking darkly in his direction. Eddie started walking reluctantly toward her, and she breathed a sigh of relief.

At that moment the screen door on the side porch opened and the girl who was her neighbor came out. She didn't see Millie at first, for she picked up a white folding chair and started into the house with it.

The next moment her eyes met Millie's. There was a little flick of surprise, hastily concealed. Then she saw Eddie coming slowly toward his mother.

The girl smiled at Millie, a warm, friendly smile. "I guess he wanted to come to the party, too," she said.

Millie nodded miserably, looking at the dirty-faced Eddie coming toward her. "I just come up from down street," she managed to say, her voice high-pitched and embarrassed. "I'm sorry if he bothered you. I never knew him to do like this before."

"Oh, he didn't hurt anything," the girl said quickly. "Wait." She disappeared into the house and came out again almost immediately. "Here's some cake. Give it to him, and to the other children too. You may keep the plate. It's an old one, and I won't have to pack it."

The girl walked toward her. Falteringly, Millie met her eyes. "I'm sorry yer goin' away," she said with difficulty. She seized Eddie's hand now and took the plate from the girl with the other.

There was an awkward pause.

Millie looked around, almost wildly. Her eyes fastened on the red table, gay in the sunlight. "Yer red table sure looks nice," she said. Then she fled, dragging the struggling Eddie with her.

Later she remembered she hadn't even thanked the girl for the cake nor the plate.

Strip, the water still clinging to his hair, stood in the cellar doorway. It was the next afternoon.

"Well," he said, hanging his towel on the doorknob, "I see they's some new furniture around. Where'd yuh git the table?" He jerked his hand toward the back yard where the red table stood resplendent on the scant patch of grass at the edge of the vegetable garden. A glass jar with two spikes of hollyhocks stood stiffly on it, near the center.

Millie kept her eyes on the eggs she was scrambling. "The truck came and got their stuff this morning," she said. "Two men brought this over and said the lady next door didn't want to store it and wanted us to have it. They jess set it down and went away."

"I saw the young fella and the girl pullin' out when I went to work this morning. They musta had to get an early start." Strip walked to the kitchen door just as the youngsters, Helen, Eddie, and Sam, came around the corner of the house. The two boys whooped and made a dive for the new red table, hanging from its edge and swinging their feet.

Millie came to the door. "Helen, you help carry the dishes out." Her voice somehow didn't sound like her own. "We're goin' to eat outside tonight. Strip, you might carry the chairs."

"I'll help," shouted Eddie. "I help," mouthed little Sam, running into the house behind Eddie.

Within five minutes, dishes, chairs, and food had been taken out. Everything was ready.

"We're startin'," she heard Strip yell from outside. "C'mon, Millie."

"I'll be there in a minute," Millie answered. "I want to see if baby is all right."

But she didn't stir toward the hall. Instead she walked softly to the kitchen door.

No gay laughter was coming from the direction of the red table now. Instead there was a clattering of spoons, noisy shouts, and the scraping of plates. The big catsup bottle she had sent out was standing beside the jar of hollyhocks, partly concealing them. The brown chairs looked shabbier in the sunlight than they had before. The red table itself looked strange and out of place. As strange as the white mantelpiece had looked against the splotched oatmeal paper. Somehow it didn't fit.

Millie, with effort, raised her eyes to look over at the old stone house. Below, around the red table, was gathered her own bright measure of life, too familiar to her to be recognized as such. All of these lives —the lives of Strip and the four sturdy youngsters—were being molded by her but she didn't see that now. She was conscious only of the old house, so dark and empty. In the sense of loss that swept her, she was again vaguely aware of the red table.

Her glance came back to it. Without her realizing it, the table had already become part of her, a symbol of things to work for, a buffer against the lifelong, hard-to-change things which pressed in on her.

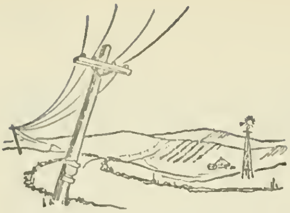
As yet, it wasn't really hers. It would belong to her only as she made it belong; it would fit only when, through the months and years, she made it fit. Millie knew it now.

She walked out of the kitchen and sat down on the chair they had left for her. She didn't look again at the old stone house although she was facing it directly.

Little Sammy scrambled from his chair and ran to her. He had a piece of bread in his hand. "Sp'ead it for me, Mommy," he said, climbing up on her knee.

Millie turned sideways, leaning for a moment against the brightness of the red table. She knew Strip was watching her. "Yer eyes look kinda funny, Millie," he said, quietlike. "You ain't been cryin', have yuh?"

But Millie pretended she hadn't heard. She only squeezed Sammy more tightly to her, taking the bread from his hand.



They Shall Arise

Grant Marshall

THERE was the earth, and the people were rooted in it like the trees, the grasses, and the weeds, like the crops. They slept on it, they trod it, they lived with it, by it, for it. The menfolks watched it for signs. They knew the power of the earth. The women and children looked at the men and knew. The men shifted uneasily. The dust from the southwest dried in streaks on their sweaty faces. They mopped it away, leaving horizontal stripes on their cheeks.

A drought might come up north, but there was plenty of water in the River. Plenty and to spare. No need to worry. And part of the country drifted away in sooted clouds, and the land, which once fed, needed food itself and had none. The people who tilled it watched with reddened eyes as fences, sheds, even houses disappeared under clouds of driven earth. The earth which had fed them, fled, and they must flee, too, lest they starve.

But north along the River, men made ready to plant their crops as soon as the frost was out of the ground. "The sweet corn there by the corner of the house and the beans on the poles left from last year. . . . No need to move the poles. . . . Looks like it might blow up somethin'!"

Dark clouds crossed the sun. The rain came in cold slivers and disappeared in pockmarks on the surface of the snow. Slowly the white cover melted. The mud showed in black patches, and the water ran in streams through the soft earth. The snow was soon gone, and in its place stood puddles. The men buttoned up their coat collars and pulled down their caps when they ventured out. A group of them gathered down by the willows, and one of them stuck a pole in the mud. They stayed a little while, then hunched farther down into their coats and trudged back to a supper of salt pork and Northern beans.

The rain splashed on the tin roof and leaked in through the makeshift structure while they ate. Everything was cold and clammy.

The puddles broadened into little lakes as time went on. A day or two passed. The slough spread out and covered the pig wallow. Down at the river bank, the men watched the rise. The stake was one quarter submerged. "It can't keep up," they said. "My Pop said it never rained enough to wet the bottoms. What'll we do?" They turned and plodded back through the gloom. But still the rain cascaded through the hills and deepened in the valleys. The trees dripped, and their bark was shiny with moisture. The huts that rimmed the slough were dark and wet inside, and the people were afraid.

Slowly, slowly, upward crept the level of the water. The stick was half covered now, and shortening fast. Three-quarters. The banks of the River were hardly discernible as the water reared along. Debris was thick. Overflowing its levee, the creek had flooded the road. The willow shoots poked individually through the surface of the water. Gradually the slough filled. From the tiny windows, fearful eyes watched the rise of the water. Day became night, and night, day, with little difference, but always there was the rain soaking everything.

"It can't be. It will stop, and then everything will be all right." They went back to sitting on their stools. The children slept. Outside, the rain poured increasingly on the flimsy hovels. The boards were soaked through. The roof leaked. Everything was wet. The men waited. And still it rose. The water topped the slough bank and rounded the willow. The chicken yard was half covered; the puddle at the steps reached out to meet its neighbors. The barrel-stave fence stood in a puddle, its gate sagging loosely.

And then a board floated loose. It thumped on the corner of the house and passed on. But the men had seen. Silently they woke the children and carried them through the water up the path to the highway. The women brought a few comforters, a side of bacon, and that was all. They stood there in the scant shelter of the bluff. Down in the bottoms, the water swirled on. The folks who had built on piles delayed leaving, hoping for the rise to cease, the crest to pass, yet knowing what the outcome would be. Even a few hours might make a difference. But still the water rose, and even these people had to leave and wade to safety. The water rose, reached the doorsteps of the first shacks, climbed on, and on, upward, and upward, over everything.

The people watched with painful faces while their tiny shanties were swept away by the River. The chickens were gone, the shoat and the sow were loose or drowned, the privy tilted and was dragged down, its moon-crested door flopping open. The water swelled on while the men stood about in little groups, chewing twigs, and waiting. The women tried to quiet the whimpering children and watched the men for hope, waiting. The shed was down, the fence was gone, the boat broke away and was smashed on the cottonwood tree. But the River rolled on.

The mighty River that fed and cleansed and nurtured, that mothered the young, that favored the old, had rebelled. And the earth in which these people were rooted, on which they lived, was gone, swept down by the will of the River. The rain and the water had come, had washed the earth away, the houses away, but the men remained.

"What shall we do? Where can we turn? There ain't nothin' left." The men knew the answers. "Back to the River. It beat us, but we love it. It beat us, but we need it. . . . It beat us!"

The rain halted eventually and the crest was passed. The water receded and the men ventured down into the bottoms. The women and the children followed the men. One stooped down and picked up a battered pie plate and began to dig in the muck. "It beat us, but we love it. We need it!"

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Notes on the Authors

RUTH BASS.—Ruth Bass, a native of Mississippi, is a graduate of the University of Miami, from which institution she received her B.A. degree in 1929. "I live on the family plantation 'Morganna' near Hazlehurst, Mississippi," she writes, "and between cotton crops am engaged in research in the field of folklore." Miss Bass has contributed articles and stories to various publications. Her "Fern Seed—For Peace" appeared in *Folk-Say* for 1930.

WARREN BECK.—Warren Beck lives in Appleton, Wisconsin, where he is Professor of English and a tutor in literary composition. He was born in Richmond, Indiana, and was reared by his grandparents. His "Shadow of a Green Olive Tree" appeared originally in *Prairie Schooner*. Stories of his have been included in two of the "Best" annuals—1939 and 1943—and in Whit Burnett's *Seas of God*. His novel *Final Score*, a 1944 Knopf publication, won the 1944 award of $750 from the Friends of American Writers.

IVAN BEEDE.—Ivan Beede, now living in New York City, is a native of Nebraska. "I spent my childhood," he says, "in David City, Nebraska. In 1918 I was graduated from the University of Nebraska, where I specialized in journalism. I have been a newspaperman in Boston, a free-lance reporter in Paris, and was a contributor to, and one of the assistant editors of, the *Transatlantic Review* in Paris. I was one of the Paris group that included F. M. Ford, Djuna Barnes, Nathan Asch, Ernest Hemingway, Robert McAlmon, Jean Rhys, and Josephine Herbst." Mr. Beede's contribution to *Mid Country* appeared originally in the Winter 1928 number of *Transition*.

STEPHEN VINCENT BENET.—The late Stephen Vincent Benét, best known as the author of *John Brown's Body* and "The Devil and Daniel Webster," was born in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, July 22, 1898. He was educated at Yale, receiving two degrees, B.A. and M.A., from that university. Among his books of poems are *Ballad of William Sycamore, King David, Ballads and Poems,* and *Nightmare at Noon*. "Invocation" from *The Western Star* is reprinted from *American Prefaces*.

JOHN PEALE BISHOP.—The late John Peale Bishop was born in Charles Town, West Virginia, May 21, 1892. He was educated at Princeton University, served as a first lieutenant in the infantry in World War I, and from 1920 to 1922 was Managing Editor of *Vanity Fair*. With Allen Tate he edited *Twenty Years of Creative Writing in the United States*. His main literary endeavor was probably in the field of poetry, although he published a volume of stories and a novel. Among his published poetic works are *Green Fruit, Now with His Love,* and *Minute Particulars*. His poem "O Pioneers" was published originally in the *Southern Review*.

B. A. BOTKIN.—Born in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1901, B. A. Botkin spent his first twenty years there and in New York City getting his education. From 1921 to 1937 he lived and taught in Mid Country, mainly at the University of Oklahoma, where he founded and edited *Folk-Say* and *Space*, with one year at the University of Nebraska and summers at the University of Montana and New Mexico Normal University. During the past eight years he has resided in Washington, D. C., first as Rosenwald Fellow, then as Folklore Editor of the Federal Writers' Project, and lately as Chief of the Archive of American Folk Song in the Library of Congress. In 1944 he published *A Treasury of American Folklore* and was President of the American Folklore Society. He is the author of *The American Play-Party Song* and Fellow of the Library of Congress in Folklore. He now makes his home at Croton-on-Hudson and is devoting full time to writing and lecturing in the field of American folklore and regionalism.

VERNE BRIGHT.—Now living in Aloha, Oregon, Verne Bright was born in Brookfield, Missouri. He was educated in the public schools of Kansas and Oregon, and holds a B.A. degree from Pacific University, 1925. He pursued graduate studies at Pacific University and the University of Oregon, and for several years thereafter was engaged in newspaper and editorial work. Since 1942 he has been Material Expeditor for the Oregon Shipbuilding Corporation, Portland, Oregon. "I have been writing," he says, "since high-school days, and have had over 1,200 poems published in such magazines as *Poetry*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Voices*, and the *London Poetry Review*, as well as in some forty anthologies, including those of Braithwaite, L. A. G. Strong, and Thomas Moult." Mr. Bright's contribution to *Mid Country* first appeared in *Frontier and Midland*.

A. J. Broadwater.—A. J. Broadwater's "Wolf Hunt" is but one of several actual experiences recounted by contributors to *Mid Country*. An old-timer, Mr. Broadwater was living in Havre, Montana, when his narrative appeared in *Frontier*, May, 1931. Under the editorship of Harold G. Merriam the *Frontier* was highly successful in preserving the lore, the pioneer life, and the history of the Northwest.

Erskine Caldwell.—Erskine Caldwell was born December 17, 1903, in White Oak, Georgia, and attended public schools in Virginia, Tennessee, and Georgia. For short periods he studied at the University of Virginia and the University of Pennsylvania. Before identifying himself definitely with the career of writer he worked in a variety store, played professional football, dealt in real estate, and worked on newspapers. He lived for several years in Maine, during which time he wrote two novels, *Tobacco Road* and *God's Little Acre*. Other books by him are *We Are the Living*, *Some American People*, and *Kneel to the Rising Sun* (short stories). Mr. Caldwell is Editor of the American Folkways series. His story "The People's Choice" made its first appearance in *Folk-Say*.

Walter V. T. Clark.—Walter V. T. Clark lives in Cazenovia, New York. He submits the following statement about himself: "I was born in Maine in 1909, picked up my first confused and excited notions of life in the woods and around the ponds there, and on a farm in West Nyack, New York. My folks moved to Reno, Nevada, when I was seven, and those upland deserts and mountains and the California shores became my country while I went through school and college there. I did a couple of years of graduate work in Vermont and was married there. After another year of writing in an Adirondacks farmhouse—selling only a few fugitive poems—I came to Cazenovia, and with the exception of a few trips west I have been here ever since, teaching English and coaching dramatics and some sports.

"My first novel, *The Ox-Bow Incident*, was published by Random House in 1940, was a Reader's Club selection, and received other reprints. My second book, *The City of Trembling Leaves*, was published in May of this year (1945), also by Random House." Mr. Clark's short story "Buck in the Hills" was first published in the *Rocky Mountain Review*.

Nancy Clemens.—Nancy Clemens, of Springfield, Missouri, is the author of two juveniles for girls—*Girl Scouts in the Ozarks* and *Under Class*. With Vance Randolph she wrote *Camp Meeting Murders*, published in the United States by Vanguard Press and in England by Cassels. This latter work has been again published (1945) by Crestwood Publications in a twenty-five-cent edition. Miss Clemens has been printed by the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Esquire*, *Ken*, and other magazines. "Mountain Sibyl" is from the *University Review*.

Alberta Wilson Constant.—Author of "They Set a Good Table," Alberta Wilson Constant has this to say about herself: "My life has been entirely a Southern-Southwestern affair, for I was born in Texas, raised in Tennessee, and then removed to Oklahoma, where I've lived ever since. The things I have had published have been largely plays. Some of my plays have appeared in *Amateur Acting* and *Play Production* by Wayne Campbell, in *100 Non-Royalty One-Act Plays*, and in *Twenty-five Non-Royalty Plays for Children*. I've had articles in the *Southwest Review*, the *Library Journal*, and the *Oklahoman*." Mrs. Constant's *Mid Country* contribution is from the *Southwest Review*.

William Cunningham.—William Cunningham was born in Okeene, Oklahoma, May 13, 1901. A graduate of the University of Oklahoma, he has been a newspaperman, a high-school teacher, and a teacher at Commonwealth College, Mena, Arkansas. His work has appeared in the *American Mercury*, *Folk-Say*, and the *Windsor Quarterly*. His tall tale "The Cloud Puncher" is reprinted from the last-named publication.

David Cornel DeJong.—David Cornel DeJong was born in Holland in 1905 and at the age of thirteen came with his parents to the

United States. He began earning his living when he was fifteen and has worked at a variety of occupations, among them bricklaying, house painting, and teaching. He was educated at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan, and at Brown University. At the latter institution he made a year's progress toward a Ph.D., but gave up his graduate studies in favor of a writing career. Mr. DeJong has published five novels, two volumes of poetry, and an autobiography. Among his novels are *Bella Fulla Straw, Light Sons and Dark,* and *Benefit Street.* His books of poetry are *Across the Board* and *Domination of June.* A new novel, *Somewhat Angels,* is scheduled for 1945 publication. His poem "East Wind" was first printed in the *Southwest Review.*

AUGUST DERLETH.—One of America's most prolific writers, August Derleth was born in Sauk City, Wisconsin, February 24, 1909, and still lives in the town of his birth. He writes close to a million words a year, is the author of more than thirty books, and has appeared in more than two hundred periodicals, from magazines like the *Yale Review* and the *Atlantic Monthly* to publications like *Outdoors* and the *Country Gentleman.* In 1938 he received a Guggenheim fellowship to aid him in carrying on his Sac Prairie Saga, a program involving the writing of some fifty books designed to depict the growth and development of the Sauk-Prairie country from about 1820 to 1950. Some of his book titles are *Wind Over Wisconsin, Place of Hawks, The Wisconsin: River of a Thousand Isles,* and *Shadow of Night.* His *Mid Country* story is from *American Prefaces.*

J. FRANK DOBIE.—J. Frank Dobie was born on a Texas ranch, September 26, 1888; has spent most of his life in his native state; and is widely known for his interest in Texas history and legends. He is Professor of English at the University of Texas, President of the Texas Folk-Lore Society, and the author of a number of books, among them *A Vaquero of the Brush Country, Coronado's Children, Tongues of the Monte, The Flavor of Texas,* and *The Longhorns.* In 1943–44 Professor Dobie occupied the Chair of American History at Cambridge University. His latest book *A Texan in England* grew out of his year at Cambridge. He has written for various magazines. His *Mid Country* selection is from the *Southwest Review.*

GLENN WARD DRESBACH.—Glenn Ward Dresbach was born September 9, 1889, in Lanark, Illinois. He received his high-school training at Lanark and attended the University of Wisconsin, where he was Editor of the *Wisconsin Magazine,* 1910–11. "On April 9, 1944," he says, "I married Beverley Githens of Chicago, one of the foremost poets of the 'Line O' Type' of the Chicago *Tribune.*" Mr. Dresbach's poetry has been widely published, having appeared in such magazines as the *Yale Review,* the *American Mercury,* and the *Virginia Quarterly Review.* He is the author of nine volumes of poetry, among them *In Colors of the West, The Enchanted Mesa,* and *The Wind in the Cedars.* His *Mid Country* poem is from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.*

VIRGINIA DUNCAN.—Virginia Duncan was born something over a third of a century ago on a ranch in West Texas. She is a graduate of the State Teachers College in Alpine, Texas. From 1930 to 1942 she taught school, supplementing her inadequate salary, part of that time, by working for the firm of Elmo Roper on *Fortune Magazine* surveys. "I interviewed in the evenings, on week-ends, and during the summers," she says. "The work brought me into contact with a true cross-section of the population of West Texas. At the same time I helped my sister operate our ranch, which gave me an opportunity to enjoy outdoor life and to raise horses." In 1942 Miss Duncan moved to New York City, where in January, 1945, she began free-lance writing. First printed in the *Southwest Review,* Miss Duncan's "The Snake Without a Friend" was reprinted in the *Reader's Digest,* and now enjoys a third printing in *Mid Country.*

LOREN C. EISELEY.—Loren C. Eiseley was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, September 3, 1907. He is a graduate of the University of Nebraska, and holds a Ph.D. degree from the University of Pennsylvania. The Social Science Research Council granted him a post-doctoral fellowship in physical anthropology for the year 1940–41, and he spent the year in study and research at Columbia University and the American Museum of Natural History, New York City. As a poet Dr. Eiseley has been printed by a number of magazines, the *Midland,* the *American Mercury,* and *Poetry,* among others. As a scientist he publishes technical and semipopular articles in the field of anthropology, and has contributed to such journals as the

American Anthropologist, Science, the *Scientific American,* and *American Antiquity.* Dr. Eiseley is Head of the Department of Sociology at Oberlin College. His poem "Tasting the Mountain Spring" is from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.*

PAUL ENGLE.—Paul Engle, poet and novelist, was born in 1908 in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. For nine months of the year he lectures on poetry at the University of Iowa; in the summer he lives on a farm near Stone City, Iowa. "My people," he writes, "were farmers on both sides, but my father was a trainer and handler of gaited saddle horses." Mr. Engle is a graduate of Coe College and of the University of Iowa. His first book of poems, *Worn Earth,* was accepted at the latter institution as a thesis for the M.A. degree in creative writing, and was the first book so to be accepted. Mr. Engle did graduate work in English and anthropology at Columbia University in 1932–33, and during the years 1933–36 he was a Rhodes Scholar at Merton College, Oxford. Since 1937 he has been at the University of Iowa, where he is head of the creative writing program. Mr. Engle is the author of six books, among them *Break the Heart's Anger, West of Midnight,* and *Always the Land,* a novel. His contribution to *Mid Country* first appeared in *American Prefaces.*

ALICE HENSON ERNST.—Alice Henson Ernst is Associate Professor of English at the University of Oregon. Her early childhood was spent in the Northwest, her parents being pioneers who came West to settle in northern Washington. In 1912 she was graduated with honors from the University of Washington, and did graduate work at that institution, as well as at Radcliffe and Yale. She traveled in Europe in 1924 to study theaters, and is the author of two books of plays: *High Country* and *Backstage.* Much of her recent writing is in the field of the theater and is based in part on a study of the ritual dances and ceremonial masks of the Indian tribes of the Northwest. Some of her sketches of Indian dances and masks have been printed in *Theatre Arts,* and the University of Oregon Press is publishing her study *The Wolf—Ritual of the Northwest Coast.* Her *Mid Country* poems are reprinted from the *Frontier and Midland.*

S. S. FIELD.—A New Orleans writer, S. S. Field is thirty-eight years old. He attended the University of Pennsylvania as a student of engineering and architecture, and then became a newspaperman in New Orleans. His first short story "Torrent of Darkness" was published in the *American Mercury* and was included by Edward J. O'Brien in his *Best Short Stories of 1936.* His story "Good-bye to Cap'm John" is reprinted from the *Southern Review.*

VARDIS FISHER.—Vardis Fisher, American novelist, has this to say about himself: "Born about a half-century ago in a one-room shack on a wild Idaho frontier, he was intended by his parents for a Mormon bishop, but rebelled at the age of 18, left the church, and has been done with formalized religions ever since. Instead of becoming a bishop he became a college professor (and out of the side of his mouth he says there is no demonstrable difference between the two); but after being fired from several universities ('Except in one instance,' he says, 'I always beat them to the boot by resigning.') he returned to his native Idaho in 1931, and (he observes dryly), except for an interlude of 4 years as Idaho Director of FWP (Federal Writers' Project), has devoted himself to writing and hard work ever since.

"The 'hard work' is no overstatement. In Hagerman Valley, Fisher and his wife have built their own home, plus several outlying buildings, with no assistance of any kind; and there today Fisher is trying to work out a hobby in horticulture by planting several thousand trees and discovering, as he puts it, 'that I have no green touch for the members of the heath and rhododendron families in heavy gumbo.' When not spraying or fertilizing, irrigating and fencing, milking and plowing, hammering and nailing, or watching thousands of rainbow trout in his lake, or listening (we quote him) 'to imbeciles like Moss Hart who say only imbeciles live by preference in the country,' he is writing on a series of novels which (again we quote) 'are intended to suggest how man became a monkey.' "

Mr. Fisher is the author of a number of important works, among them *Odyssey of a Hero, Forgive Us Our Virtues, Children of God,* and *The City of Illusion.* His story in *Mid Country* is from the *Rocky Mountain Review.*

JOHN GOULD FLETCHER.—John Gould Fletcher, widely known American poet, was born in

Little Rock, Arkansas, January 3, 1886, and now lives a few miles outside that city. He was educated at Harvard University, traveled extensively in Europe, and lived for some years in London. His writings include both poetry and prose. In 1939 his *Selected Poems* brought him the Pulitzer Prize. His poetry is studied in college English courses and has been reprinted in innumerable anthologies. Some of his book titles are *The Tree of Life, Branches of Adam, XXIV Elegies, The Epic of Arkansas,* and *Some American Poets.* His contribution to *Mid Country* is from the *University Review.*

E. S. FORGOTSON.—Now living in New York City, E. S. Forgotson was born December 7, 1916, in Alexandria, Louisiana. He received his college training at three universities—Louisiana State University, Vanderbilt University, and the University of Iowa. His poems, stories, articles, and reviews have appeared in such magazines as *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse, American Prefaces,* the *Southern Review,* and the *Nation.* For the past two years he has worked in the research department of the New York *Post,* but expects to enter editorial work with a publishing house or a magazine when the opportunity presents itself. His poem "The Death of Tom Mix" is from *American Prefaces.*

ROBERT FROST.—Although New England is his literary domain, Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, March 26, 1875. He lived in that city for ten years, then moved with his mother to Lawrence, Massachusetts, his father having died. He was educated at Dartmouth and Harvard. Before his reputation as a poet was established he earned his living as mill-worker, cobbler, rural schoolteacher, small-town editor, and farmer. In 1912 he gave up farming and went to England, remaining there for some three years before returning to America. His first books of poetry, *A Boy's Will* and *North of Boston,* were published while he was abroad. In 1924 and in 1930 he won the Pulitzer Prize for poetry. Other works by him are *Mountain Interval, West-Running Brook,* and *The Witness Tree.* His poem "Trespass" is reprinted in *Mid Country* from *American Prefaces.*

WAYNE GARD.—Wayne Gard was born in Brocton, Illinois, June 21, 1899. He holds a bachelor's degree from Illinois College, a master's degree from Northwestern University. Concerning his newspaper work and his writing he has this to say: "After work as a newspaper reporter in Illinois, India correspondent for the Associated Press, and editorial writer for the Chicago *Daily News* and the Des Moines *Register and Tribune,* I joined the staff of the Dallas *Morning News* as an editorial writer, in 1933. I have contributed articles to the *American Mercury,* the *Nation,* the *New Republic,* the *Reader's Digest,* and other magazines. I have published a handbook on book reviewing and a biography of Sam Bass, the noted brigand and train robber of the seventies." Mr. Gard's "Rooster Fight" first appeared in the *Southwest Review.*

DANIEL MERSHON GARRISON.—The late Daniel Mershon Garrison's contribution to *Mid Country* is from B. A. Botkin's *Folk-Say,* 1931. The following statement about the author of "Oilfield Idyl" is from that publication: "Daniel Mershon Garrison was born in Charleston, South Carolina, August 29, 1903. His education includes one year at the United States Naval Academy, four years at St. John's College (Annapolis), and one summer at Johns Hopkins. His travels include 'England, Haiti, Canada, Oklahoma, ale, rum, rye, and corn.' He is now finishing his education in the employ of the Carter Oil Company at Seminole, Oklahoma, where he has had two years in the ditch."

WILL GIBSON.—Will Gibson lives in Topeka, Kansas, where he teaches music. He is twenty-nine years old and married. His stories and poems have been printed in numerous magazines, among them the *University Review, Esquire, Harper's Bazaar, Household,* and the *American Scholar.* He is the author of a verse play that is to be published by Samuel French, and is an assistant editor of *Experiment: A Quarterly of New Poetry.* Mr. Gibson's contribution to *Mid Country* is reprinted from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.*

CAROLINE GORDON.—Caroline Gordon, American novelist, is the wife of Allen Tate. She was born October 6, 1895, on Merry Mont Farm, in Todd County, Kentucky, near the Tennessee state line. For generations her people have been countrymen—specifically, tobacco planters—and the background of her novels is chiefly the Tennessee-Kentucky region that she knew as a girl. Miss Gordon has contributed short stories to various magazines, and is the author of a number of novels, the latest being *Green Centuries,* an historical novel of the Southern frontier, and *The Women on the Porch,* a novel about the past in the present, the setting being partly New York and partly Tennessee. Her short story "Her Quaint Honour" originally appeared in the *Southern Review* under the title "Frankie and Thomas and Bud Asbury."

J. EVETTS HALEY.—J. Evetts Haley lives on a ranch near Spearman, Texas. He has collected manuscripts for the library of the University of Texas, and is the author of *George W. Littlefield, Texan, Charles Schreiner, General Merchandise,* and *Charles Goodnight, Cowman and Plainsman.* Mr. Haley's contribution to *Mid Country* is from his study "Driving a Trail Herd," which appeared originally in the *Southwest Review.*

CAROL ELY HARPER.—Carol Ely Harper lives in Walla Walla, Washington. Her verse has been published in most of the literary magazines of the United States and has appeared again and again in the *Canadian Forum.* She has been a newspaper reporter and correspondent for the Walla Walla *Union* and the Portland, Oregon, *Oregonian.* Her fiction has appeared in the *Musician,* the *Washington Farmer,* and *Direction.* Three of her book manuscripts of verse are under consideration by publishers. One of them, *Big Bend of the Columbia River,* is a novel in free verse. Her poem "Washing Up for Supper" appeared originally in *Experiment: A Quarterly of New Poetry.*

JAMES HEARST.—James Hearst operates Maplehearst Farm, near Cedar Falls, Iowa. Mr. Hearst was born on the farm, which was bought by his grandfather in Civil War days when he came to Iowa from New England. "I grew up on the farm," writes Mr. Hearst, "and went to country school in District No. 7. I learned to read and enjoy books at home under my mother's influence." Mr. Hearst is the author of two books of poems: *Country Men* and *The Sun at Noon.* His *Mid Country* poem is reprinted from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.*

HARRY G. HUSE.—Harry G. Huse was born in Fullerton, Nebraska, April 15, 1890. He was educated at the University of Nebraska, and after his graduation he entered the advertising business in St. Paul, Minnesota. Then for a time he tried wheat-raising in Montana, but without marked success and soon returned to advertising, remaining in that business in St. Paul and New York City until 1924, when he began writing. In 1931 Mr. Huse again returned to advertising work, and since that time has been associated with Brown & Bigelow, of St. Paul, as, successively, Director of the Creative Department, Sales Promotion Manager, and Director of Research. "My interest in the dry-farming section of Montana," he writes, "dates back to 1910, the year of its settlement, when I spent a summer on a dry-land homestead and from which I had to be dragged back to finish college. The high dry benches were very glamorous to me then, with whitened buffalo skulls still to be picked up and the old freighting trails still deeply etched in the tough soil of the prairie." Mr. Huse's "High Tension" is from the *Frontier.*

MARY KING.—Mary King (O'Donnell), now living in San Francisco, was born near Houston, Texas. She was educated at the University of Texas, and has been a stenographer, a private secretary, and a newspaper correspondent. Her husband, the late E. P. O'Donnell, was the author of *Green Margins,* the first Houghton Mifflin fellowship book, and in 1939 she herself, as the recipient of the same fellowship, wrote *Quincie Bolliver,* published in 1941. "The Honey House" is from the *Southern Review.*

FREDERICK KLEIBACKER.—Frederick Kleibacker, was born December 12, 1908, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He holds a B.A. degree from Bowdoin College, and attended the Yale University Drama School, studying playwriting and play production. For two years he directed the Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Community Players, and for six years was Director of the Nashville Community Playhouse, a theater cited by *Stage Magazine* as one of ten outstanding community playhouses in the country. In October, 1942, he entered the Army and is now a captain. He has written a number of plays, the best being *The King's Coat, John Micheljohn, Sailors of Toulon,* and *Lady Wildcat.* The last-named play appeared originally in *American Prefaces.*

JOSEPH LANGLAND.—Joseph Langland grew up on an Iowa farm, and knows at first hand the life he depicts in his poems. He holds two degrees—B.A. and M.A.—from the University of Iowa, and while he was a student at that university he spent much time in the Writer's Workshop with Paul Engle and Wilbur Schramm. Mr. Langland's poetry has been printed in a number of "little" verse magazines, as well as in *American Prefaces,* the *American Mercury,* and the *Saturday Review of Literature.* He is a first lieutenant in the Army, and in a letter from Weimar, Germany, May 30, 1945, he says: "My work with the European Civil Affairs Regiment is that of military government in Germany. In the course of my duties I have been through a good part of France, most of Belgium, and most of Germany. And now that V-E Day is past and I have a little time in the evenings I am putting down some of my experiences and my interpretations of things German. My notes cover several of the widely publicized horror camps. . . . The cities here are all smashed, but the countryside is beautiful, the farms well kept, and the people industrious and arrogant even in smashing defeat." Mr. Langland's poem "Renter" is from *American Prefaces.*

MAURICE LESEMANN.—Born in Chicago in 1899, Maurice Lesemann was educated in the public schools of that city and was graduated in 1920 from the University of Chicago. His poetry began appearing in *Poetry* in 1920, in which year he was awarded the Young Poet's Prize. In 1927 he won the Levinson Prize. Mr. Lesemann lived for some time in New Mexico, where—according to a note in Harriet Monroe's *The New Poetry*—he studied "the habits and emotions of the more primitive members of the three races who live in the state's high spaces of plain, desert, and mountains." Mr. Lesemann's *Mid Country* poem is reprinted from *Poetry: A Magazine of Verse.*

MERIDEL LE SUEUR.—Meridel Le Sueur was born in Murray, Iowa, and was raised, not reared, so she says, in Oklahoma, Texas, Kansas, Illinois, the Dakotas, and Minnesota. She has little formal education, having gone to high school for only one year. Her first story came out in the *Dial,* and she has contributed to the *American Mercury,* the *Woman's Home Companion,* and virtually all the "small" magazines. She has been reprinted in numerous anthologies, notably in the late Edward J. O'Brien's collections, in which she appeared seven times. She is the author of *Salute to Spring,* and wrote *North Star Country* for Erskine Caldwell's American Folkways series. Her story "God Made Little Apples" is reprinted from *Prairie Schooner.*

JAMES FRANKLIN LEWIS.—James Franklin Lewis is Chairman of the Department of Chemistry at the University of Kansas City. Born in Indiana in 1903, he grew up in that state and in Illinois and Iowa. "I received my A.B. degree from De Pauw University in 1925," he writes, "and my Ph.D. from Ohio State in 1930. Since then I have been teaching in colleges and universities. During the past few years I have published poetry, criticism, and reviews in some 27 or 28 of the best little magazines. I was poetry editor of the late *Crescendo* and am now an associate editor of the *University Review,* Kansas City, Missouri." Four collections of Dr. Lewis's poetry have been published: *Days of Pity, Freedom in Bondage, Score for This Watch,* and "Beyond the Page," a section in *Three Young Poets.* His poem "The Country Is the Land" appeared originally in *Experiment,* under the title "There and Nowhere."

JACK M. MACDONALD.—As this note is being written, Jack M. MacDonald is probably on his way overseas, there to serve with the Field Directors' section of the American Red Cross SAF. "I am a newspaper man," he says, "and am one of four partners publishing newspapers in four Pennsylvania towns—Grove City, Mercer, Sandy Lake, and Slippery Rock. I live in Slippery Rock and work in Grove City." Writing at times under the pen name of Alan MacDonald, Mr. MacDonald has appeared in over thirty national magazines, including the *Saturday Evening Post, Reader's Digest, Esquire,* and *Mademoiselle.* He has also contributed to many of the "little" magazines, and his work has been included in such anthologies as O'Brien's *Best Short Stories* and the *Bedside Esquire.* His *Mid Country* contribution is from the *Southwest Review.*

WILLIAM MARCH.—William March, American novelist and short-story writer, lives in New York City. His real name is William March Campbell, and he was born in Mobile, Alabama, September 18, 1893. He was educated at the University of Valparaiso (Indiana) and the University of Alabama. At the latter university he studied law, and in the fall of 1916 he went to New York and worked as a law clerk and a subpoena server. Mr. March's stories have been reprinted in some twenty-five short-story anthologies and textbooks. Perhaps his most famous story is "The Little Wife." Two volumes of his stories have been published, and a third is scheduled for appearance in the fall of 1945. Among his novels are *Company K* and *The Talons.* His contribution to *Mid Country* was first printed in the *Kansas Magazine,* and was then included in his book *Some Like Them Short.*

ALICE MARRIOTT.—Alice Marriott was born in Wilmette, Illinois. She moved to Oklahoma at the age of seven, was educated in the public schools of Oklahoma City, and in 1935 was granted a B.A. degree by the University of Oklahoma. She has been Acting Curator of the Museum of the Southern Plains Indians and specialist in Indian Arts and Crafts for the Indian Arts and Crafts Board, U. S. Department of the Interior. Since 1943 she has been General Field Representative of the American Red Cross. Her articles have appeared in *Harper's,* the *American Mercury,* and the *Southwest Review,* and she is the author of *The Ten Grandmothers,* published in 1945 by the University of Oklahoma Press. Miss Marriott's contribution to *Mid Country* is from the *Southwest Review.*

GRANT MARSHALL.—Grant Marshall was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1920, and lived in its suburbs for fourteen years. In 1934 he moved with his parents to the Mississippi River town of Burlington, Iowa. "I attended the Burlington High School and Junior College," he says, "then went to Grinnell College, where I first became seriously interested in writing. 'They Shall Arise' was written as an exercise in preparation for a novel about these river-bottom people—a novel still unfinished. After college I was employed professionally by the Boy Scouts of America until I entered the Army in July, 1942. Commissioned in October, 1942, I left for overseas in January of the following year. Now after 26 months in India, I am back home waiting release from active duty so that I can return to writing." Mr. Marshall's story is reprinted from *Tanager.*

CURTIS MARTIN.—Curtis Martin, whose home is in Cimarron, New Mexico, is a lieutenant in the United States Naval Reserve and has been on active duty in the Pacific for over two years. Mrs. Curtis Martin, his wife, submits the following information about him: "His biography is very much like that of a lot of others of his generation. He obtained a couple of college degrees in time to enter his generation's war. His first published story was accepted by *Story,* and he has since then had several printed in the small literary magazines. His first novel, *The Hills of Home,* published by Houghton Mifflin, came out only a few days before his thirtieth birthday. Aside from writing, he likes to hunt, fish, and play chess." Mr. Martin's story "The Storm" was first printed by the *New Mexico Quarterly Review.*

EDGAR LEE MASTERS.—Edgar Lee Masters, author of an American classic, *Spoon River Anthology,* was born in Garnett, Kansas, August 23, 1869. He was educated in an Illinois high school, attended Knox College for a year, and after studying law in his father's office, was admitted to the Illinois bar. He became a successful Chicago lawyer, but gave up the practice of law to devote himself to the career of letters. He has been a prolific writer as poet, novelist, and biographer. Among his poetic works are *The Open Sea, Songs and Satires,* and *The New Spoon River;* two of his novels are *Mitch Miller* and *Skeeters Kirby;* two of his biographies, *Lincoln—The Man* and *Vachel Lindsay.* "New Hope Meetinghouse" first appeared in the *University Review.*

ELIZABETH H. MIDDLETON.—Elizabeth H. Middleton was living in Wolf Point, Montana, when *Frontier and Midland* published her story "Four Eagle," but she now lives in Lanham, Maryland, having moved five times since leaving Montana. She writes: "I was born in Framingham, Massachusetts, in 1902. Upon graduating from Vassar College in 1925, I married and went to Venezuela, where my husband was a doctor for Standard Oil. Then we returned to Iowa, his home state, where we lived for a number of years. After that came the United States Indian Service, with stations in Alaska, Montana, and Wisconsin. Since 1941 we have been Army people, frequently on the move. We have six children, three of each kind, and home is rarely the quiet, meditative sort of place writers prefer. At present I am working on novels, being deep in the revision of my first two, both of which deal to some extent with Indians."

C. A. Millspaugh.—C. A. Millspaugh's contribution to *Mid Country* was published originally in *American Prefaces*, April, 1940.

Aubrey V. Neasham.—"Coursing the Coyote," Aubrey V. Neasham's contribution to *Mid Country*, was first printed in *Frontier and Midland*. In the "Covered Wagon" notes of that magazine appears the following statement about Mr. Neasham: "Aubrey V. Neasham teaches at the University of California. He has reviewed for this magazine many books."

Albert J. Partoll.—Albert J. Partoll lives in Missoula, Montana, where he was born September 3, 1904. He has two academic degrees, both from the University of Montana. As author and editor of a number of historical writings, he has evinced a deep interest in Northwest historical research. For a time he followed journalism, and in 1940 was Supervisor of Federal Census for Western Montana. His career, he says, has been interspersed with episodes and a variety of experiences, and his present ambition is to finish several manuscripts on the fur trade of the Selish country of the Northwest. He is a bachelor and likes to fish and smoke a pipe and enjoy the outdoors. Mr. Partoll's contribution to *Mid Country* appeared originally in the *Frontier*.

Conrad Pendleton.—Conrad Pendleton lives in Portland, Oregon. "I was born," he says, "on Kickinghorse Flat, near Long Creek, Oregon. As a writer I aim to confine my poetic particulars to the cow and the sheep country (Blue Mountains) of Eastern Oregon, especially to my birthplace Kickinghorse Flat—titanically mountained in. I want to express what is steadfast in the flux of existence, especially in these days of bald disillusion and cataclysmic impact. There, under and within the local facts, I have found the integrated wisdom of generations—an elemental harmony—that will again renew man's faith in the actual world. It's a slow, robust stability, which gives similitude to all eras, gives sequence and purpose throughout all time and changes." Mr. Pendleton has contributed verse and stories to a number of magazines, among them the *New Republic*, *Poetry*, and *American Prefaces*. His *Mid Country* poem is reprinted from *Prairie Schooner*.

Katherine Anne Porter.—Katherine Anne Porter's literary reputation rests virtually altogether on her short stories. She was born in Indian Creek, Texas, and received her early education in private schools. A discerning statement by her about her life and growth as a literary artist may be found in *Twentieth Century Authors* and should be read by anyone interested in the character of her work. Her published writings include the following titles: *Flowering Judas*, *Pale Horse, Pale Rider*, and *The Leaning Tower and Other Stories*. "The Source," her contribution to *Mid Country*, first appeared in *Accent*, a magazine that has printed part of her biography of Cotton Mather.

Pearl Price Robertson.—Born in Lamar, Missouri, February 12, 1887, Pearl Price Robertson now lives in Ronan, Montana. When she was four years old her family moved to Shelby County, Illinois, where she grew to womanhood. As a girl she read everything she could lay her hands on, mostly out-of-date newspapers, the almanac, and the family Bible. "I married," she says, "when I was nineteen, and in 1910 came with my schoool-teacher husband to try the vicissitudes of homestead life in Montana. We found the going plenty tough. After repeated crop failures we came, with a family of ten children and not a dollar in our pockets, to western Montana to try farm life anew in an irrigated section. Here we acquired a home, and reared and educated the children. I have seven daughters, three sons, and nine grandchildren." Mrs. Robertson's "Homestead Woman" is from the *Frontier*, where it appeared under the title "Homestead Days in Montana."

Mari Sandoz.—Mari Sandoz was born in Sheridan County, in the Nebraska sand-hill country. As a girl she trapped muskrats and coyotes, pitched hay, and herded cattle. Her father, Jules Ami Sandoz, the subject of her famous biography *Old Jules*, was a native of Switzerland, as was also her mother. Miss Sandoz attended rural school for some five years but did not attend high school. In June, 1922, she entered the University of Nebraska, where she took work off and on for several years. From 1927 to 1929 she was Associate Editor of the *School Executive Magazine*, and from 1934 to 1935 was one of the editors of *Nebraska History*. Her articles and stories have appeared in many periodicals, among them *Prairie Schooner*, *Story*, the

North American Review, and the *Atlantic Monthly.* She is the author of two novels, *Slogum House* and *Capital City,* and two biographies *Old Jules* and *Crazy Horse.* She has been living in New York City for the past few years.

KATHARINE SHATTUCK.—Katharine Shattuck was born and educated in Denver, Colorado. "I taught school," she says, "in cattle towns on the plains, in the dust bowl when the dust was blowing, and in Denver. I studied at the University of Iowa with Paul Engle, Eric Knight, and Robert Penn Warren. After leaving Iowa I worked in New York for a time at odd jobs. I was a governess, a clerk in a liquor importing firm, a copyist in a bank. For the past year I have been teaching English and writing at Westminster College in New Wilmington, Pennsylvania. I am working on a novel." Miss Shattuck's short story "The Beast" appeared originally in *Accent.*

FRED SHAW.—Born in Tifton, Georgia, February 26, 1910, but now living in New Mexico, Fred Shaw has this to say for himself: "I'm a Georgian by birth and background—always lonely for the hills, the pine woods, the tobacco fields, and the wiregrass when I'm away too long. Until I entered college I lived in the courthouse town where I was born and where my Scotch-Irish father spun yarns on the street corners. On Saturdays the streets were thick with Negroes and farmers and crossroads politicians. After five years in colleges in Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas, I weathered the depression in a South Georgia high school. Later I taught English at Alabama Polytechnic Institute and journalism at New Mexico A & M. For the past year I've been writing news and feature stories for the New Mexico Extension Service." Mr. Shaw's *Mid Country* story was first published in the *Southwest Review.*

CHARLIE MAY SIMON.—Charlie May Simon supplies *Mid Country* readers with the following statement about herself: "I was born August 17, 1897, in the backwoods of Arkansas. My father was a country schoolteacher, and my mother was one of his pupils until she married him. From my earliest days I remember the stories my father would write, but he put them carefully away after reading them to us. He didn't send them out for publication, but kept them, as a secret vice, for it was unheard of there for an able-bodied man to spend his time writing stories. It seemed the natural thing to do when I myself began to write. By next year I shall have fourteen published books, and I have lost count of the short stories. 'Big Brother' is my only adult short story, however. I am married to John Gould Fletcher, the poet, and we live in a grey stone house overlooking the Arkansas River, a few miles from Little Rock." "Big Brother" is from the *University Review.*

WALLACE STEGNER.—Wallace Stegner, American novelist and short-story writer, was born on a farm near Lake Mills, Iowa, February 18, 1909. With his parents he moved from place to place and saw a good deal of the Midwest and the Northwest and something of Canada. He has two degrees from the University of Iowa, a master's and a doctor's, and has taught at various institutions, among them the University of Wisconsin and Harvard. He is the author of *Remembering Laughter, The Potter's House, On a Darkling Plain, Fire and Ice,* and *Mormon Country.* Mr. Stegner's story "The Colt" was first printed in the *Southwest Review.*

JAMES STEVENS.—Authority on Paul Bunyan and his exploits, James Stevens was born November 25, 1892. He has this to say about himself: "You don't have to be born in forest country to develop a great love for the trees and the people of the woods. James Stevens has made his career in the big-tree country, but he was born in Iowa, which is noted for farms, not forests. At the age of ten he was sent to the Snake River Valley of Idaho to live with relatives on an irrigated farm. Two years later he got his first job in the woods, and from that time on he has made his own living. An early start, to be sure, but it gave him just that much longer to do the kind of work he wanted to do. For the next seventeen years he moved about the Western states, working at logging and sawmilling. Then came a year and a half of service with an infantry regiment in the World War. He began to write at thirty, and has so far produced six books: *Paul Bunyan, Brawnyman, Mattock, Homer in the Sagebrush, The Saginaw Paul Bunyan,* and *Timber.* All this besides any number of stories and articles in leading magazines. Mr. Stevens now has headquarters in Seattle, where he serves as Information Director for the West Coast Lumbermen's Association." Mr. Stevens' "The Passing of the Timber Beast" appeared originally in the *Frontier*.

JESSE STUART.—Jesse Stuart, Kentucky poet and writer of fiction, was born in W-Hollow near Riverton, Kentucky. As a boy he had to help his parents make a living; hence he had very little elementary education. His father could neither read nor write, but he sent his children to school whenever he could spare them from farm work. Jesse Stuart has tried his hand at four kinds of writing, and has been especially successful with the short story. His *Man with a Bull-Tongue Plow* is a book of poems; *Beyond Dark Hills* is an autobiography. His novel *Taps for Private Tussie*, published in 1943, won the Thomas Jefferson Award of $2,500 and became a Book-of-the-Month selection. Other books by him are *Trees of Heaven*, *Mongrel Mettle*, and *Album of Destiny*. His story "Rank Hester's Hired Help" first appeared in the *Southwest Review*.

RUTH SUCKOW.—Ruth Suckow, American novelist and short-story writer, was born in Hawarden, Iowa, August 6, 1892, and now lives in Cedar Falls, Iowa. As the daughter of a Congregational minister Miss Suckow experienced life in a variety of Iowa towns and cities. She was educated at Grinnell College and at the University of Denver. From the latter institution she holds two degrees, B.A. and M.A. She made her first public appearance as a writer when her stories were printed in John T. Frederick's *Midland*. Since then she has written steadily and is the author of a number of novels and books of short stories. Among her best-known works are *Country People*, *Iowa Interiors*, *The Kramer Girls*, and *The Folks*. Miss Suckow's "A Rural Community" was first published in the *Midland*.

KATHLEEN SUTTON.—Kathleen Sutton was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, but has lived most of her life in Alabama. For the past few years she has held a full-time war job as draftsman. She writes both poetry and fiction. Her poems have appeared in the *Atlantic*, the *Saturday Review of Literature*, *Free World*, *Poetry*, and so on. Her stories have been printed by the "small" magazines, and several of them were listed on Edward J. O'Brien's Honor Roll. Miss Sutton is the author of three volumes of poetry: *Masquerade*, *Through Many Doors*, and *This Is the Season*. Her sketch "You Should See Shettles" is reprinted from the *New Mexico Quarterly Review*.

ALAN SWALLOW.—Alan Swallow was born in Powell, Wyoming, in 1915. He was educated at the University of Wyoming and Louisiana State University, and has taught English at the University of New Mexico and Western State College of Colorado. He is editor of the *American Writing* volumes and is poetry editor of the *New Mexico Quarterly Review*. His own poetry has appeared in many magazines, among them *Prairie Schooner*, *Voices*, and *American Prefaces*. He is the author of *The Practice of Poetry* and *XI Poems*, and before entering the Army in October, 1943, he was a printer and publisher of poetry. Mr. Swallow's contribution to *Mid Country* is from *American Prefaces*.

ROBERT SWIFT.—As recently as 1943 Robert Swift was living in Springfield, Ohio. His story "Timber Justice" was first printed in the *Tanager*, September, 1928. Mr. Swift attended Grinnell College, the school where that magazine is published.

RUBY PICKENS TARTT.—Ruby P. Tarrt's "Earthy-Ann" appeared originally in the *Southwest Review*. Mrs. Tartt resides in Livingston, Alabama, where not long since she was seriously injured when a tornado demolished her 120-year-old colonial home. W. P. Tartt submits the following note about her: "Mrs. Tartt had never expected to write but had hoped that she might some day paint portraits. To this end, she studied in New Orleans and New York for a great many years. At an early period in her studies she became deeply interested in portraying the old 'before-the-war' type of Southern Negro. This work renewed her childhood love of Negro spirituals and other Negro songs and she began collecting them. Later she assisted John A. Lomax in making hundreds of recordings of these songs for the folk-lore division of the Library of Congress. These recordings were made in Mrs. Tartt's home and in the Negro churches near Livingston, Alabama. The collecting of these songs led to closer contact with the Negroes, and they told her manv interesting stories of their lives which she hopes later to submit for publication."

ALLEN TATE.—Since 1944 Allen Tate, well-known American poet and critic, has been

Professor of English at the University of the South, where he is also Editor of the *Sewanee Review*. He was born in Winchester, Kentucky, November 9, 1899, received his early education at home and at a private school, and was graduated from Vanderbilt University in 1922. He is the husband of Caroline Gordon, American novelist, and is the author of numerous works, among them *Jefferson Davis: His Rise and Fall, Robert E. Lee, The Mediterranean and Other Poems, The Winter Sea,* and *The Language of Poetry.* He has contributed articles and poetry to the *New Republic,* the *Virginia Quarterly Review, Hound and Horn,* the *Yale Review,* and the *Southern Review.* During 1940–41 Mr. Tate took part in the program "Invitation to Learning," Columbia Broadcasting System. His contribution to *Mid Country* appeared originally in the *Kenyon Review.*

FRANK THONE.—Frank Thone was born April 12, 1891, in Davenport, Iowa, and is now living in Washington, D. C. He attended the Des Moines, Iowa, public schools, and was graduated from Grinnell College in 1915 with a bachelor of science degree. He earned his doctor's degree at the University of Chicago. "I was trained primarily in biology, especially botany," he says, "and expected to be a teacher and research man. But I switched to science popularization in 1924, after a couple of years of teaching, including one academic year at the University of Florida. It was in Florida that the 'gator hunt occurred. During the summers of 1922–24 inclusive I was naturalist-lecturer in Yellowstone National Park, and since 1924 I have been Editor in Biology with Science Service, an institution for the popularization of science." Dr. Thone belongs to a number of scientific societies, and is President of the Biological Society of Washington. His *Mid Country* narrative is from *Tanager.*

PAT T. TUCKER.—It was in the seventies that Pat (Patrick) T. Tucker, old-time cowpuncher, came into Montana from the Texas cattle country. He was living in Livingston, Montana, when his "Buffalo in the Judith Basin" appeared in the *Frontier,* March, 1929. His book *Riding the High Country* relates his experiences with cowboys and Indians and tells of his close association with Charles M. Russell, the one-time famous artist of the Northwest cattle lands. The book was published by Caxton's and edited by Grace Stone Coates, well-known American writer of short stories. Under date of June 8, 1945, Mary E. Tucker, of Livingston, Montana, writes that she has many stories by her father "in his own hand."

RUDOLPH UMLAND.—Rudolph Umland is author of one of the four tall tales in *Mid Country.* He is a native of Nebraska, and gives his birthyear as 1907. From 1925 to 1928 he studied engineering and fine arts at the University of Nebraska, but tiring of the academic life he walked out of an English class one fine day and took to the road, spending several years traveling by side-door Pullman. In the course of his travels he worked at a variety of occupations in the United States, Canada, and Mexico. Upon his return to Nebraska he took up farming and helped his father run the home place during the depression years of the thirties. From 1936 to 1941 he was Assistant State Supervisor of the Nebraska Writers' Project, and from 1941 to 1942 he was State Director of that enterprise. He has contributed articles and stories to *American Speech, Esquire, Prairie Schooner,* the *University Review,* and *Story.* During 1942 and 1943 he worked as an administrative assistant for the Office of Censorship at New Orleans. "Since the spring of 1944," he says, "I have been giving my life for my country as a classification specialist with the Army ground forces at an infantry replacement training center in Texas. It appears that I shall be here for the duration." Mr. Umland's "A Thresher's Tale" was originally published in *Prairie Schooner.*

MELVIN VAN DEN BARK.—Melvin Van den Bark was born in Omaha, Nebraska, in 1897. He is a university graduate, and for some time he lived and taught in the sand-hill country of Nebraska. At present he is writing for radio. He has contributed a number of articles to *American Speech* on "sand-hill talk," "Nebraska cow talk," and "Nebraska pioneer English." With Lester V. Berrey, Mr. Van den Bark compiled *The American Thesaurus of Slang,* a highly important work. "Two Women and Hog-Back Ridge" was first printed in John T. Frederick's *Midland,* and was included by Edward J. O'Brien in his *Best Short Stories of 1924.* In a review of four volumes of English, French, Continental, and American short stories, Louis Bromfield, writing in *Books* (the New York *Herald Tribune*) February 15, 1925, makes special mention of Mr. Van den Bark's story: "There are at least three stories in the collection that emerge somewhat ahead of the others. These are 'In a Thicket,' by Glenway Wescott; 'Four Generations,' by Ruth Suckow; and 'Two Women and Hog-Back Ridge,' by Melvin Van den Bark."

Mark Van Doren.—Mark Van Doren, American poet and critic, was born in Hope, Illinois, June 13, 1894. He was graduated with an A.B. degree from the University of Illinois, and holds a Ph.D. degree from Columbia University. As literary editor he was on the staff of the *Nation* from 1924 to 1928. His *Collected Poems,* published in 1939, brought him the 1940 Pulitzer Prize in poetry. He is the author of *Spring Thunder and Other Poems. Jonathan Gentry, Our Lady Peace and Other War Poems,* and critical works such as *Henry David Thoreau, A Critical Study* and *The Poetry of John Dryden.* His *Mid Country* contribution is from the *Southern Review.*

Stanley Vestal.—Stanley Vestal (Walter Stanley Campbell) is Professor of English at the University of Oklahoma, where he directs courses in professional writing. He was born in Kansas in 1887, grew up in Oklahoma, and was the first Rhodes Scholar from that state, 1908–1911. During World War I he served as a captain in the 335th Field Artillery, A.E.F. His chief interests are Western history, the Plains Indian, and literature. Under the pen name of Stanley Vestal he has written numerous published works, among them *Kit Carson, Sitting Bull, Mountain Men, Short Grass Country* (Erskine Caldwell's Folkways series), *The Missouri,* and *Writing Magazine Fiction.* His articles have appeared in such magazines as the *Saturday Review of Literature,* the *American Mercury, Reader's Digest,* the *Journal of American Folklore,* and the *American Oxonian.* At present Professor Campbell is making a study of literature in the Southwest under a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation and the University of Oklahoma. His narrative "The Duel with Yellow Hand" was first printed in the *Southwest Review.*

Walter Prescott Webb.—Walter Prescott Webb is Professor of History at the University of Texas. He was born in Texas and grew up in the western part of that state when the frontier was passing. He holds three degrees from the university in which he teaches. In 1938 he was called to England to give the Harkness Lectures in History at the University of London, and in 1942 he was elected Harmsworth Professor of American History at Oxford. He spent the school year 1942–43 at that university. "I am now engaged," he says, "in making a study of the frontier and its influence on Western civilization and in developing Friday Mountain Ranch, a saddle-blanket ranch in the hills west of Austin. This ranch produces armadillos, polecats, ringtails, foxes, deer, cedar brush, ticks, rattlesnakes, pecans, wild plums, wild cherries, acorns, and contentment. It does not produce any money, and so I have to keep pretty busy to support the ranch." Dr. Webb is Editor of the *Southwestern Historical Quarterly* and Director of the Texas State Historical Association. He is also Editor-in-Chief of *The Handbook of Texas,* now in preparation, and is the author of three books: *The Great Plains, The Texas Rangers,* and *Divided We Stand.* The first was awarded the Lombat Prize, and the second was filmed by Paramount as the Texas Centennial Picture, 1936. Dr. Webb's contribution to *Mid Country* is from the *Southwest Review.*

Raymond Weeks.—Raymond Weeks was born in Tabor, Iowa, January 2, 1863. In 1866 he and his parents went by covered wagon to Missouri, and lived for about a year on a farm owned by Walter and Eva Beach, the parents of Rex Beach. From there they moved to the village of Kansas City, Missouri. "I was graduated from the Kansas City High School," says Mr. Weeks, "and a few years later from Phillips Academy, Andover, Massachusetts. I then entered Harvard with the class of 1891 and was granted an M.A. that same year. That fall I went as instructor in French to the University of Michigan, where I taught for two years. I then passed two years in Europe as a Traveling Fellow to Harvard. On my return to the United States I was appointed Professor of Romance Languages at the University of Missouri, where I remained for thirteen years. I received my Ph.D. from Harvard in 1897, and concluded my teaching career at Columbia University, retiring in 1929." Mr. Weeks has been president of the Spelling Reform Association, of the American Dialect Society, and of the Modern Language Association. He has published numerous articles on phonetics and medieval French literature, and is the author of many published short stories.

He lives at his home "Rochambeau," Manakin, Virginia. His *Mid Country* story was first printed in the *Midland.*

EUDORA WELTY.—Regarded in many quarters as one of America's most important writers of short fiction, Eudora Welty is the author of three volumes of stories: *A Curtain of Green, The Robber Bridegroom,* and *The Wide Net.* Her home is in Jackson, Mississippi, where she was born and brought up. Like many another literary artist, Miss Welty experienced certain difficulties in finding magazine and book publication for her stories. In the last year of his life no less a figure than Ford Madox Ford busied himself trying to find a book publisher who would venture to bring her out. A discerning study of Miss Welty and her literary background was written by Katherine Anne Porter as the introductory essay for Miss Welty's book *A Curtain of Green,* a work that has been published in England, as have also her two other books of stories. Her *Mid Country* story "The Whistle" was first printed in *Prairie Schooner.*

JESSAMYN WEST.—Jessamyn West, whose home is in Napa, California, was born in Indiana, and is a birthright member of the Society of Friends. Her great-grandmother and great-great-grandmother were Quaker ministers, and she has gone to Quaker meetings all her life. She is a graduate of Whittier College and was doing work toward a doctor's degree at the University of California when her education was interrupted by a doctor's verdict of tuberculosis. "Then in a sanatorium," she says, "my education really began, and I found that Keats was right when he said that we only truly know that which we have learned on our pulses." Miss West has appeared in many magazines among them the *Atlantic, Harper's, Collier's,* and the *Ladies' Home Journal.* She is the author of a forthcoming book to be called *The Friendly Persuasion.* Her *Mid Country* selection is from the *New Mexico Quarterly.*

JOHN T. WESTBROOK.—John T. Westbrook offers the following information about himself: "Since Pearl Harbor I have been soldier (inducted 1942) and farmer. Previously, I was an English instructor at Mississippi State College, the University of Chicago, and the University of Missouri. I was born in Louisiana February 4, 1905. My present poetry effort is a series of regional pieces (idyls); they will probably become a book if I can ever finish twenty of them. The *Southwest Review* is bringing out three, and the *University Review* recently published one. I have also contributed verse to *Prairie Schooner, Fantasy,* and the *American Mercury,* as well as to a number of other magazines." Mr. Westbrook's *Mid Country* poem is from the *Southwest Review.*

CLYDE W. WILKINSON.—Clyde W. Wilkinson was born July 4, 1910, in Coleman, Texas. He was educated in the public schools of that town, attended the University of Texas, and in 1933 was granted a master's degree by that university. He did postgraduate work at three universities, one of them being the University of Illinois, and taught English for four years at Texas Agricultural and Mechanical College, 1936 to 1940. He is now on leave from that institution while serving with the Armed Forces overseas. His interest in the literature of the Southwest was aroused while he was a student under J. Frank Dobie at the University of Texas. His article "Backwoods Humor" is reprinted from the *Southwest Review.*

JOHN W. WILSON.—John W. Wilson was born twenty-five years ago in the Navasota country of Texas. As a writer he has a keen interest in the folkways of that region, particularly in the superstitions and lore of the Negroes living in the bottoms of the Brazos River. Prior to joining the Marines in 1943, he was a student at Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas. His short story "Uncle Tige Benedict" was first printed in the *New Mexico Quarterly Review.* Other stories by Mr. Wilson have appeared in the *Southwest Review.*